

THE RED RAVEN LIBRARY

STIRRING TALES OF OLD BUCCANEER DAYS

CAPTAIN KIDD IN NEW ORLEANS OR THE PIRATE SCOURGE OF THE RIGOLETS



BY AN "OLD SALT"

"Just as he will walk out of your trap!" roared Captain Kidd, as he threw himself forward upon the Governor of New Orleans.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: At some time or other the fascination of life at sea takes hold upon the imagination of the average lad who has healthy red blood in his veins. From the day he is able to read the stirring adventures of Robinson Crusoe, a yearning to travel and look upon strange sights the world over takes possession of him. Usually this gradually gives way to the less strenuous pleasures that surround him at home, but in innumerable instances it has led young fellows to go forth to seek their fortune. And next to Robinson Crusoe, boys have somehow loved to read of the bold buccaneers who harried the sea at the time Spain was sending the treasures stolen from Mexico and Peru across to the mother country. In this series we purpose giving thrilling stories of those notorious old sea tigers and what wonderful adventures three brave boys met among them. These stories will be found exciting enough to please everyone, but above reproach, since there is not the slightest design shown to glorify the life of a buccaneer or pirate, but rather the reverse. They are the very best tales that money can buy, and we believe will receive a rousing welcome from boys.



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Capt. Kidd in New Orleans

OR, THE PIRATE SCOURGE OF THE RIGOLETS.

By AN OLD SALT.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Thad, Oliver and "Simple Simon," the three boy chums who set out to win renown and benefit humanity by capturing the notorious Captain Kidd, the most dreaded "scorcher of the seas," at the time New York was but a small town. Thad was the recognized leader of the valiant trio, and Simon very often proved to be not so very "simple" after all, since he possessed a bold heart, and was ready to risk much for the right.

Captain Kidd, the most notorious pirate of early days, whose name has always been associated with dark deeds along the Eastern coast, from Maine to the sunny shores of the West India tropic isles; and especially in connection with various deposits of treasure-trove which he is believed to have made in myriads of lonely spots during his warfare upon the commerce of the blue seas.

Dragon, the "right bower" of Kidd, a desperate fighter, as cruel and ruthless as he was fearless, and between whom and "Simple Simon" there seemed to spring up a bitter feeling of enmity from the very beginning of their acquaintance.

Hugo, the Hunchback, a deformed outcast, who seeks the sneers he has received from the careless world by taking up the career of a free rover.

Noland, a lieutenant under Kidd.

Jack Cropper, once a guardsman, but now hand in glove with the buccaneers.

Anthony Crozat, a French merchant of New Orleans, who had accumulated much property.

Captain Joinville, one of his captains.

Mathilde, niece of Crozat.

De Blenville, the French Governor of New Orleans.

Col. Montmorency, of the King's Guards, a valiant soldier who fought under the lilies of France.

CHAPTER I.

THAD AND HIS CHUMS IN THE TOILS.

Capt. Kidd stood alone on the deck of the *Red Raven*.

That famous vessel was plowing through the moonlit waters of the Caribbean Sea.

The pirate had left the Cape Verde Islands far behind and now his sails were set for other seas. For in the New World—in the Gulf of Mexico—he expected to strike hard for treasure, since he knew that valuable cargoes waited his coming.

The loss of the last two treasure galleons, which had escaped through his fingers through the efforts of Thad and his chums, had brought about this change of scene.

All around the *Red Raven* lay that wonderful sea which for years had been the hunting ground of the buccaneers.

On the high poop deck of the ship the sea wolf looked down upon the expanse of water.

The pennant which now and then flutted out, showing

its strange emblem, floated from his masthead, and the captain of the *Red Raven* was absorbed in thought.

Beside the watch, he was alone on deck.

Certain sounds which now and then reached his ears from below told Kidd that a good deal of merriment held sway underneath the *Red Raven's* deck.

A smile would now and then pass over the sea wolf's face, for he knew that Dragon and his companions were having a good time with rum and song.

Presently there came up from below a man who stood for a time at the coamings of the main hatch and watched the silent and statuesque figure on the poop deck.

It was Noland.

The second officer of the pirate barque at last came forward, and still contemplating Kidd, stopped at the foot of the ladder.

Kidd looked down and caught sight of him.

"Come up, Mr. Noland," said the pirate chief.

Noland mounted to the side of his captain and waited for him to go on.

"This is a night of nights, Mr. Noland," said Kidd, as he again cast his eyes over the sea.

"We are in the heart of the Caribbean," was the reply.

"In the paradise of waters," said Kidd. "We are on the old hunting grounds of our kind. Now, Mr. Noland, if some prize would come in view, we would have a little chase."

Noland did not reply for a moment.

His handsome face grew sad, and then a smile crept to his lips.

"Come, Noland, you are not in a rejoicing mood to-night," Kidd continued. "Mend me, I hope you are not tired of our sea hunts."

"Not tired of them, captain, for what better can we do, outlawed as we are?"

"Outlawed? That's it!"

"It is a hard word to speak, captain," responded Noland. "But, nevertheless, there is no other word that fits the situation."

"Right you are, Noland. What is the merriment below deck?"

"They are having a merry time over the prospects ahead. Dragon and Hugo the Hunchback are at the head of the table——"

"And the boys?"

"Oh, they are in their cabin, but when I left it was proposed to bring them into the carouse."

"There will be a little fire spitting if they so decide," was the answer. "Dragon may find his hands full. The boys have not been punished for their last escapade, and I believe I did promise Mr. Dragon that he should discipline them a little."

"Yes."

"And he may take this opportunity to play his little game of vengeance."

"With your approval, captain?"

Kidd nodded.

"I'm afraid I go a little too far in my promises to Dragon," he said at last. "But you see we can't dispense with his services."

Noland looked Kidd fairly in the eye.

"Do you think we are in any danger of losing Dragon?" he asked.

"He has threatened it."

"I know he has. But what would he do?"

"Get another ship, I fear, and rob us of some of the legitimate spoil of the sea."

"Think you so, captain?" cried Noland. "Must you forever take notice of Mr. Dragon's threats?"

"I can't lose him."

Noland did not speak, but turned to give ear for a second to a wild outburst of song that came up from the revellers.

Both Kidd and Noland listened in unison.

"Now, Mr. Noland," said the captain of the *Red Raven*, in another minute. "You were telling me some days ago of a sweetheart you had in some corner of the world."

Noland started.

"It is true, Mr. Noland?"

"I have a love," he said, gently. "I have a love as fair as the flowers on the hills of Italy."

"You are becoming poetical, sir," laughed Kidd. "By my troth, I would like to see this fair damsel."

"As William Kidd, but not as the captain of the *Red Raven*," said Noland, with a swift glance at his commander.

"What! fear you that I would make love to her?" cried the sea wolf.

"I prefer to have her remain where she is."

"She will probably be better off there."

"A thousand fold. She has never gone to sea, and while such folks as ourselves prowl around the ocean, she is happier and safer where she is."

Kidd did not reply to these last words.

His glance sought the expanse of water, and when he again turned to his second officer his brow had darkened.

"When do you expect to see her?" he asked.

"I cannot say."

"If we are all hanged for piracy——"

Noland laid his hand on the captain's arm.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I have no desire to pull hemp at the command of the king's executioner."

"Which we shall probably do one of these fine days," laughed Kidd. "We're up against a hard proposition, Mr. Noland. Show me the place where we would dare attempt to lead quite lives."

"I cannot, sir."

"Just as I thought. We are pirates, proscribed by royal proclamation."

"And actually hunted in all parts of the world."

"Just so. We will soon turn up in the gulf. We shall thunder at the gates of New Orleans, and, perhaps, we shall find some of our old hunters there."

"I doubt it not," answered Noland. "But this is not a very pleasant subject."

"That is true, Mr. Noland. I have laid away the pearl necklace for your love."

Noland started.

"The one that belonged to the Portuguese princess?" he asked.

"Yes. It is a beautiful necklace. It is one of the finest that ever came into our keeping. The princess might be wearing it yet had not——"

"Had not Dragon, in the blackness of his heart, forced her onto the plank."

"Harry me, I believe Dragon is responsible for the loss of the Portuguese princess."

"Yes, he did it," cried Noland, bitterly.

"Mr. Noland, you are prejudiced against my first officer," said Kidd, as he toyed with the hilt of his cutlass.

"It is a fact that I have no brotherly love for that monster," was the reply.

"What say you about the necklace?" asked Kidd, without taking notice of Noland's last words.

"I thank you, captain. I have seen the necklace. It is a gem."

"Yes, fit for the neck of a queen."

"But I could not think of placing it around Dove's neck."

"Because of its recollections?"

"Yes, there's blood on the necklace, captain."

"Tush, man!" cried Kidd. "There's blood on more than one-half of our treasure."

"So there is."

"We don't get much treasure that is not stained."

"That's the pity of it."

"So you do not care to give the necklace to your love?" said Kidd, with a little laugh. "Well, we will think over it, Mr. Noland. There they go again. Would you object to going below and telling Dragon, in gentle tones, that, while I hope he is having a good time, I would like to have less noise in the ship?"

Noland turned away.

"Don't irritate him," called out Kidd. "If he is deep in his cups and the carouse is very high, let it continue. Don't mention it."

Noland was on the lower deck.

He glanced up at Kidd, and then bounded down the ladder.

In the passage below he paused and listened to the noises that had come to his ears during the last ten minutes.

He knew that the revel was at its height, and he knew as well that there was rum at the bottom of it.

Noland made his way toward the forecabin, from which the sounds proceeded.

As he entered the place he paused and looked about. A long table had been placed in the heart of the commodious forecabin, well lighted by numerous lanterns which cast their ruddy glare around, showing the grotesque figures of Kidd's wild crew.

There was a clinking of mugs and goblets, and from the crowd came songs that would have made a hardened criminal blush.

A stern look came into Noland's eyes as he looked and listened.

"The worst wretches unhung!" he said to himself. "Why did I ever embark upon this career?"

The echo of his words was the only answer he got, and he walked forward.

"That's right, Hugo. Bring the young rats forward!" cried out the stentorian voice of Dragon at this juncture.

This led Noland to look further along.

He caught sight of the strange figure of the hunchback, and then he saw Thad and his chums in undress, for they had been surprised in the act of going to their berths.

The lips of Noland met hard at the sight.

"This is outrageous," he muttered. "I can't see why Capt. Kidd hangs to these two rascals."

A loud cry had already greeted the appearance of Thad and his friends.

"Bring them on," roared Dragon. "They must have been caught abed."

"Nearly so," answered Hugo. "I caught them just as they were getting into their bunks."

"And pulled 'em out? Ha! ha!"

The figure of Noland was half concealed by a post, which stood between him and the lanterns, and he could gaze unobserved.

He saw the three boys pulled forward, and he noticed that they had been lashed together, probably by the command of Dragon.

As they were forced into the light a great shout went up from the half-drunken freebooters, and Dragon smote the wine-and-rum-spattered table with his great fist.

"They look as innocent as young Turks," he shouted, at which the whole crowd laughed.

Thad and his chums were brought on, and at last halted at the end of the table.

"Caught napping, were you?" cried Dragon, as he leered into their faces.

Thad did not notice the words.

"What is wanted, sir?" he said, as he returned the brutal glance of the first officer.

"We'll show you in a minute. We've organized a court for your trial."

"For our trial? We are answerable but to one person for anything we may have done—to Capt. Kidd."

Dragon followed Thad's words with another of his coarse laughs.

"It's all in my hands," he said. "You have been turned over to Dragon's court."

Then the brute turned to the men around the table.

"These young fellows are the ones who let the *Cordova* slip through our hands," he said to the motley group. "They've crossed the captain in more ways than one of late."

"Give 'em the yardarm," cried out a great voice like the bellowing of a bull.

"They deserve it," said Dragon. "They deserve what many an enemy has received."

"Throw 'em on the table, Hugo."

"No, not yet," put in Dragon, who knew the temper of his companion. "They are to be tried."

"Try 'em, then, and do it at once."

Dragon advanced to the edge of the table, where he steadied his huge figure.

"Men," he exclaimed, "we'll make 'em dance for us under the lash. Clear the table!"

This was done in a moment.

Every drinking vessel was swept to the floor, and the dark-faced buccaneers drew off a pace.

"Put 'em on the table, Mr. Hugo," commanded Dragon. "Slip their bonds."

This was done in a jiffy, and Thad and his chums stood above the pirates looking down upon the horde in the light of the lanterns.

They were totally unarmed.

"Now for the cats," cried Dragon, and several men bounded away.

Thad looked at Simon and Oliver.

"It's another crisis in our lives," said our hero, in a whisper. "Stand firm, boys. We will yet get the best of these two fiends."

CHAPTER II.

BLACK EYES AND BLOODY NOSES.

Noland was still a silent witness to these proceedings. Shaded by the post, he could look on without being

seen, and his blood boiled when he saw the preparations for the boys' punishment.

He knew that no mercy grew in the heart of Dragon.

That monster whom he did not like was the bane of the *Red Raven*.

Noland had often marveled why Kidd did not let Dragon do his worst.

He would then be rid of the first officer, and Noland did not doubt that Dragon would soon fall a victim either to the pirate catchers or to the vengeance of any crew over whom he might seek to obtain control.

So long as Dragon was permitted to carry out his merciless plans, so long would there be turmoil and danger under the flag of the pirate ship.

In a few moments the men came back with the whips.

These were handed to Dragon, who lifted them in the faces of Thad and his chums as he shot them a look of rage.

"You will take off your shirts," he commanded.

The boys did not move a hand.

"What! do you intend to cross me?" shouted Dragon.

"HARRY me, but I am master in the forecabin of this barque. I am the king on this throne, at least."

Hugo shrugged his misshapen shoulders, and looked at the lads.

The men began to deride Dragon, which only angered him the more; they suggested he was afraid to inflict the punishment he had decided on.

"Shirts off!" he yelled, as he danced in his passion.

"Bare your white backs!"

Simple Simon grinned in Dragon's face.

"What, do you laugh at me, you Dutch scoundrel? I shall give you the first lashes."

The eyes of Simon did not quail.

"Mr. Hugo, you will carry out my commands," said Dragon. "Seeing that they don't intend to, you will strip 'em."

Hugo shuffled forward.

He passed a sign to several sailors, and these worthies joined him at the edge of the table.

In another moment Hugo and his companions were on the table itself.

"That's it!" cried Dragon. "That's the way to board an enemy!"

Thad and his chums fell back a little way and stood side by side.

They faced Hugo and his minions, but they did not show signs of further retreat.

For a moment Hugo looked them over, and then advanced.

The hunchback was as full of rum as his friend Dragon, and he showed it in his mien.

"No fightin' here," he said, through his teeth. "If you resist, young sirs, we'll make mincemeat of all three of ye."

The boys made no reply.

"Come along, lads," called out the hunchback to his followers. "We will take their shirts off——"

"If you can," broke in Simon.

"Hear that, Hugo? The Dutch boy says 'if you can.' Now, show them what you can do," yelled Dragon.

The speech elicited a loud shout from the listeners.

In another moment Hugo threw himself forward, but was met in the midst of the charge by the stalwart fist of Simon.

The blow took the hunchback square in the gray eye, and he went down like a stuck bull.

The following moment Thad and Oliver charged down the table, and their blows drove the other pirates to the edge of it.

Our young heroes struck right and left with as good fists as were ever clinched on board any vessel.

They did not spare those before them, and Hugo, under a second blow from Simon, toppled from the table.

The man standing in the shadow of the post laughed.

At the end of two minutes Thad and his chums were in full possession of the battle ground.

They were the only ones on the table.

Some of the discomfited pirates were picking themselves up in various parts of the room, while Hugo, who was nursing a fast closing pair of eyes, was growling out his rage into the ears of Dragon.

"This is interesting, by Jove!" cried the first officer of the *Red Raven*. "They cleared the table with their bare fists. Stap me, but I never saw the like. Their shirts are not off yet. You will carry out my command, Mr. Hugo."

The hunchback turned to the table, but he could barely see now.

He lurched forward, struck the edge of the heavy table with his shin and uttered a howl of pain.

"Take the ship!" yelled Dragon.

Hugo, with an oath, scrambled upon the table once more.

He was followed by half a dozen furious, cursing pirates, and Thad and his friends saw a second battle coming.

"Charge 'em!" shouted Dragon, as he danced about. "Don't let 'em clear the table again. If you do, by Jove! I'll cat every mother's son of ye."

Goaded by rage, Hugo came down ~~the long~~ table again.

He bellowed like the bull of Bashan.

Calmly awaiting the charge stood Thad and his chums, determined not to be disciplined that night by such a company.

In another moment there was a wild fight on the top of the table, which swayed under the battle, and at times threatened to break in the middle.

Nothing but its good mahogany prevented a catastrophe.

Hugo and his wild men were forced back again.

Thad and his comrades met blow with blow, and all at once Simon jerked a cutlass from the belt of one of their tormentors and swung it in their faces.

The rage of the Dutch boy equalled that of Dragon.

He struck with the fury of a Crusader, and drove the whole gang to the very edge of the table.

They jumped off before Simon's weapon like rats deserting a sinking ship.

Dragon broke out in a howl of fury.

Suddenly he threw himself into the battle.

His huge bulk was launched upon the scene, and he rose on the table the whole crowd cheered.

Dragon gathered himself together in a moment, and, catching sight of Simon, lunged at him.

The Dutch boy, who was a veritable young Samson, dropped the cutlass, which fell into Oliver's hands, and met the charge of Dragon with bare fists.

He struck viciously at the first officer of the *Red Raven*, and landed a blow in the face.

Dragon toppled.

Simon followed up his advantage, putting in a good blow under Dragon's jugular, and that worthy fell headlong from the table upon the floor.

The fall of Dragon brought a yell from the crowd.

There was a flashing of cutlasses and pistols, and in another moment the gang was crowding upon the table from every side.

It was impossible for Thad and his friends alone to meet this wholesale charge successfully.

At this juncture there leaped from the shadow of a post not far away the nimble figure of Noland, and almost the same moment Jack Cropper pushed his way through the yelling horde.

Noland and the ex-guardsmen reached the table at the same time, but at opposite points.

Dragon caught sight of Noland, and stopped short in his rush toward the boys.

At the same time Hugo saw Jack, and forthwith went at him with the fury of a Malay.

"You're at it again, are you?" cried Jack. "My dear double eye, don't you know that I owe you a little grudge?"

Knocked down by Jack, Hugo rolled under the legs of his companions.

"Silence!" cried Noland, as he halted at the table. "This is against the captain's orders. I have just come from the poop deck, and Capt. Kidd wants less noise down here."

It had taken Noland some time to deliver his message, but he had delivered it at last.

Dragon was taken aback by this speech, but he soon recovered.

"It's false!" he raged. "Capt. Kidd gave us leave to celebrate in the fore-castle——"

"But he didn't think you were going to turn it into a bedlam," broke in Noland. "He wants to reflect on the high deck——"

"Over his shortcomings, eh, Mr. Noland?" grinned the first officer. "We don't intend to let up till we've disciplined those young rats."

"Very well. You answer to Capt. Kidd, not to Noland."

With this speech, the second officer of the *Red Raven* drew back, but he did not remove his gaze from the flushed and darkened face of Dragon.

"Take 'em, men," roared the monster. "We'll cat 'em if it costs blood."

The men were not disposed to obey orders from Kidd.

"It's your own lookout," said Noland, quietly, seeing this. "I come direct from the captain. Has he given you leave, men, to punish the young gentlemen?"

"Gentlemen?" snarled Dragon. "Wolves, you mean!"

Noland did not answer this.

"I'll answer to the captain for us all," shouted Dragon to the men. "Take him!"

Noland laid his hand on the hilt of his cutlass, but he did not draw.

Thad and his chums stood ready, with looks of defiance.

"Overturn the table!" cried some one, and with a yell several stalwart men seized the legs and essayed to upset the table.

Hugo, who had recovered from the last blow, sprang to their assistance, when Noland caught him by the collar and threw him back.

Dragon saw the act, and ran to the spot.

"You're against us," he hissed in Noland's face.

"If you please," answered young Noland, quietly.

The table went over.

It fell with a crash, sending some of the buccaneers headlong. A motley crowd sprawled on the floor.

Thad and his comrades were on their feet the moment the heavy piece of furniture touched the planks.

They backed through a gap in the pirate ranks and ranged themselves along a wall.

Jack Cropper was with them, and Noland threw them his cutlass, which Thad caught with dexterity and gripped with a firmness that told of a battle to the end.

"Make way!" shouted Dragon, raging like a lion, and the next instant he leaped forward, pistols in his hands and blood in his hard eyes.

"I'm in a killing mood now, I am!" he yelled. "Stand away from the rats, men. Let Dragon get fairly at 'em and you'll see some dead people in the fore-castle."

The breathless pirates recoiled.

All at once Jack Cropper stepped forward, and his finger pointed straight into Dragon's face.

"Try it," he cried. "Shoot one, and you'll shoot no more. Try it, fool!"

Jack was cool, which Dragon was not, and the voice of the ex-guardsmen penetrated to every part of the hold.

"The captain! the captain!" suddenly rang out half a dozen voices.

All faces were turned toward the ladder, and those nearest it fell back.

There stood Kidd in his red coat and in the glare of the lanthorns, his eyes fastened upon the wild scene below deck, and his mien as terrible as the face of a raging lion.

He did not move.

Dragon looked once and fell back.

"What's the matter?" asked Capt. Kidd, as he came forward. "I heard a racket down here——"

"It is our fracas," growled out Dragon. "We were just going to discipline the youngsters and their chum, Cropper, for losing us the treasure ships. They've resisted a little, captain——"

"What have they done?"

"Look at Hugo's face."

The hunchback showed his swollen eyes in the light, and Kidd burst into a laugh.

"Harry me, but you're not presentable at court just now, Master Hugo," he cried. "You look as if you had kicked over a dozen beehives."

"It was merely Simon Van Twiller's fists, captain," cried out the Dutch boy, and Kidd turned in Simon's direction, and the smile grew broader on his handsome face.

CHAPTER III.

JACK CROPPER THWARTS THE HUNCHBACK.

For a few seconds it looked as if there would be a renewal of the battle under the very eyes of Kidd.

Dragon was anxious to carry out his designs against Thad and his chums, for he had been beaten off, much against his will.

He stood aloof from Kidd, and did not catch his eye. Now and then he glanced at the captain of the *Red Raven*, but he dared not renew the strife without a word from the right party.

"Mr. Dragon," said Kidd, at last, "you will right your table and let this pass."

Dragon's brow grew dark again.

What! was he to be beaten off in this manner?

Must he give over his thoughts of vengeance and see Thad and his friends go unpunished after the terrible chastisement they had delivered?

Hugo had turned, cursing away, nursing his wrath, to nothing of his bruises, and a smile came again to Noland's face.

"To your quarters," said Kidd to our three friends, who, with Jack Cropper, left the fore-castle.

Dragon sullenly set the table on its legs again and smothered his rage as best he could.

He still harbored revenge.

"I would like to have Hugo's portrait, now," said Simon, with a grimace, as he passed into the little cabin, from which they had been dragged but a short time before by the hunchback and his minions. "It would make a nice picture in a gallery. I would like to take it back to New York and hang it alongside the king's in his lordship's audience chamber. No doubt it would be observed by every visitor——"

"Hugo will paint your face, if he ever gets a chance," put in Oliver. "You need not think that this is the last of our little fracas in the fore-castle."

"I hope it isn't, indeed," was the response. "If the captain had not put his nose into the place, we would have used our cutlasses on some of their crowns."

"To our sorrow, no doubt," observed Thad. "We're out of the *mêlée* with whole skulls, and we ought to consider ourselves lucky."

Simon did not respond to this, and the boys were soon afterward sound asleep.

It was not so with Jack Cropper, the ex-guardsmen.

Jack expected visitors.

He knew he had incurred the hatred of Dragon and Hugo, and he felt that he had not seen the last of these two rascals.

He did not fall asleep, but hooded his light and watched the door.

The slightest sounds were audible to his keen ears.

It was not far from midnight when a stealthy footstep came down the corridor.

Jack had not slept a wink, and he was quickly on the alert.

He thrust the lanthorn and its light under his bunk, and awaited developments.

Presently the footsteps stopped at his door, and he waited for it to open.

The movement was slow when it did so, and he saw the hideously swollen face of Hugo.

His eyes looked like two minute holes above his cheeks, and Jack could not suppress a smile when he recalled Simon's terrible blows.

Hugo crept in like an assassin.

He looked carefully around, and made out the object in Jack's bunk, which he evidently took for the figure of the ex-guardsmen.

It lured Hugo forward.

Jack crouched behind some trumpery in one corner of

the place and kept his gaze riveted upon the hunchback.

Hugo looked at the object, while one of his hands was groping beneath the folds of his sea coat.

Jack knew what was coming.

Suddenly a knife flashed in Hugo's hand.

It was lifted in mid air, and in another moment descended, and was buried in the bunk clothes.

A strange cry escaped from Hugo's lips.

"Fool!" said Jack, as he rose from his place of concealment.

Hugo turned, with an oath.

He stood face to face with the man he had come to kill.

Before the hunchback could recover himself, he was looking into the muzzle of a pistol which was gripped by Jack's hand.

"It wasn't me," grinned Jack, from behind the barrel of the weapon. "This is the time you were fooled, Master Hugo. Now, sir, I ought to rid the world of the black sheep of the Bellomonts. What say you?"

The only reply Jack got was a tigerish snarl from Hugo.

"You don't care whether I do or not, I suppose?" continued Jack. "Well, I ought to, anyhow. You came in here to put me out of the way. You're a pretty rascal, aren't you?"

"And what are you?"

Hugo had found his tongue at last.

"I'm a pirate, the more's the pity," answered Jack. "It's a calling I'm heartily ashamed of. Sit down yonder."

He pointed to a three-legged stool.

Hugo went over to it and sat down.

"It's pity that saves you," resumed Jack. "I pity the poor wretch who is at the same time a black-sheep and a family exile. You dare not go back to your king."

"No. My brother would hang me."

"That he would. And I don't know but what he would be doing the world a service."

"Think so?" grinned the hunchback.

"I'm quite sure of it. You're a traitor to your king. You came to Capt. Kidd from the meanest of motives."

"What about yourself?"

"I came because I was forced to go somewhere," said Jack, as he winced under the question. "I don't profess to be a gentleman. You did once."

"And I was," snapped Hugo. "I used to dance with the belles of New York."

"And now they'd all turn out to see you dance—on air, eh?"

"That's it, Master Cropper," said Hugo. "The very ones I used to simper sweet nothings to would go a hundred miles to see Hugo swing. But they never shall!"

"Don't be too sure of that," observed Cropper. "The king isn't done with you yet."

Hugo raised his voice and struck the table near at hand.

"I'm done with his majesty," he cried. "The king and I dissolved partnership long ago. He never catches Hugo Bellomont."

"Why not?"

Jack was interested.

He thought a time might come when he would need the friendship of this man.

"I will kill myself first," snapped the hunchback. "I will never be taken alive by the king's ships."

"That would be cowardice," said Jack. "I never thought a Bellomont would utter such words."

Hugo was silent.

"Now let us get back to your coming here to-night," resumed the ex-guardsman. "You came thither to take my life."

"Yes."

"Why?"

Hugo looked away for a moment.

"Because you help the boys," he said at last.

"Thad and his chums?"

"Yes, the rats of the *Red Raven*. They robbed us of the last galleon."

"Capt. Kidd knows that; they hate the life they are compelled to lead."

"I know that. But they take treasure ships from us."

"Can you blame them? Their hearts are not in this life. Yours and mine should not be."

"I hate the Dutch boy worst of all."

"Yes. I could tell that by your face."

Hugo tried to smile at this, but the effort was a dead failure.

"He got in his work, I see."

"And he strikes like a horse kicks," growled the hunchback, as he put his hands up to his eyes. "I never felt anything like it."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea for you to steer clear of Dragon and his hatred for a time, and see if you can't be more of a gentleman?" ventured Jack.

"When did you go to preaching, Master Cropper?"

"I am not preaching, but only putting a fair question. As long as you train with Dragon, that long you will get into constant trouble. Dragon and the three boys will fight it to a finish one of these days. That is inevitable."

"I see that," said Hugo.

"Now," said Jack, after a brief pause, "I ought to drive the ball in my pistol through your head. You came in here to kill me."

"That's just why I came."

"I could touch this trigger, and the days of the black sheep of the house of Bellomont would end abruptly."

"Yes."

"I could report to Capt. Kidd that I took your life in self-defense, and do you think he would hang me?"

"I don't think he would."

Hugo was telling the truth.

"But I won't, on one condition."

A light flashed up in the eyes behind the swelling.

"You must not help Dragon against the boys any longer," continued Jack. "You must swear to me by all that you call holy not to assist the man-monster of the ship against Thad and his chums."

"Dragon and I have a compact."

"I suspicioned as much. It is a coalition offensive and defensive, I suppose?"

"That's what it is."

"Was it a strong oath?"

"We took it on our crossed cutlasses."

"A pirate's oath," said Jack. "Very well. Then you won't help me?"

"I would incur the hatred of Dragon if I broke my vow."

"Yes. It would be one wolf sneaking away from another."

"You're pretty severe on me, Master Cropper."

"But you deserve it. Well, if you won't take the oath I was about to propose——"

"You intend to kill me?"

"As I live I do!"

Hugo took a long look at the ex-guardsman.

"We are going to New Orleans," continued Jack. "We shall have some lively work in the rigolets. Capt. Kidd, I believe, has a notion that the governor of Louisiana is a rich man. He trades in everything valuable, and New Orleans is a treasure city."

"One of the finest in the new world."

"But if you won't take the oath, you may not have a chance to pick up some of the wealth there."

Hugo struggled to his feet.

"There's my solemn oath with Dragon!" he cried. "That stands in the way."

Jack said nothing, but his face suddenly grew stern.

"Don't try to get to the door," came over his pistol.

"You are liable to fall before you could reach it."

Hugo understood and halted.

"If you are afraid to break your oath with Dragon you can at least keep your hands off Thad and his chums. I am asking nothing for myself."

Hugo looked again into the eyes that glittered behind the pistol barrel and threw out one of his own hands.

"I don't want to be killed yet," he grinned. "I will do the best I can."

"You will let up on the boys?"

"The best I can," repeated the hunchback. "That's as far as I dare go."

"See that you do," cried Jack, as he advanced toward Hugo. "See that you listen but little to Dragon of the *Red Raven*. Thad and his chums know nothing of this interview. You brought it about when you came in here after my life. Now, sir, if I ever catch you after me again with a knife in your hands, your life won't be worth a plugged penny."

Hugo nodded.

Jack lowered the pistol a little, and the hunchback reached the door.

He opened it with a quick jerk, and stepped into the semidarkened space on the other side.

"I should have killed him," said Jack to himself. "I have only temporized with a tiger. I could have made it all right with Capt. Kidd, but——"

He broke his own sentence, stopped right in the middle of it.

If he had looked out he would have seen two figures in the passageway—Hugo and Dragon.

A pistol was clutched in Dragon's hand.

"Is he finished?" whispered the first officer of the pirate barque.

"No, hang it all! He 'dummied' his bunk, and is as dangerous as ever!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF A TERRIBLE FEAR.

Anthony Crozat was a Frenchman.

He was a loyal subject of Louis XIV., and this is why he obtained the exclusive right from the king to trade in and about New Orleans.

He had a fleet of ships, and he brought slaves from Africa and many other things just as valuable.

He was immensely rich, and the vessels under his care flew their flags in every sea and bore to their master the spoils of many lands.

Kidd knew all this.

He had heard of the great wealth of Crozat, and considered him a good, fat pigeon to pluck.

The Crescent City, which had been founded by De Bienville was growing, and it contained many a wealthy man who hoarded his wealth or put it out in fleets that brought rich returns.

It was a warm night when the news that a strange sail had appeared near the city came to the ears of such people as I have described.

Now and then a pirate craft slipped across the gulf, and, entering the rigolets, or bayous, and spread havoc among the rich planters, but as yet none had levied tribute on New Orleans.

The captain of the *Red Raven* was determined to show its people that they were not exempt from plunder, and it was the pirate ship which had found an anchorage not far from the city.

Kidd was in good humor.

He smote his hips with glee when he was told by the lookout that he could see the lights of New Orleans, and he called his officers on deck and talked excitedly.

"We shall show these New World nabobs what it is to have a sea wolf at their doors," cried he. "We will take the city and sack it in the most approved manner, and when we go away they will be much poorer than they are at present."

Dragon laughed.

Hugo squinted out of his mismated eyes, and grinned while a cloud came over the handsome face of Noland, who, whatever he did, could never be more than half pirate.

As for Thad and his chums, who had not been molested since the fight in the fore-castle, they were ready for any adventure that might come.

The *Red Raven* came a little closer, for she was bold, and there were no vessels capable of battling with her.

Old Crozat was in the midst of a revel when he got news of the swoop.

"What!" he cried; "some pirate at our gates? *Mon Dieu!* I will go out and sweep him from the water and he shall not have a man left to tell the tale."

Some of the old Frenchman's guests laughed and looked over their cards, but said nothing.

They knew that Crozat did not have guns enough on his slavers to hold off a piratical barque.

But the old man was confident.

He questioned the messenger who had brought the news, and presently he received a message from the house of the governor asking him how many cannon he had.

Crozat began to take an inventory of his armament.

He called one of the captains on his fleet into a private room and began.

"M. Joinville," said he, "how many serviceable guns have we on board the *Dauphin*?"

Capt. Joinville was a liar, and he answered:

"Six-and-thirty, sire."

Old Crozat clapped his hands.

"And how many on the *Queen of France*?"

"The same number, but three of them are not in good order."

"Good!"

M. Joinville would not have told the truth for the

world, for he made it a rule never to discourage his master.

"We have—let me see—sixteen vessels now in the harbor."

"Yes, sire."

"And all in good condition?"

"Most excellent, sire."

"And we could blow any pirate out of the water?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Fine!"

Monsieur Crozat ordered the wine.

"Well, it won't be a big fight," said he.

"What, a fight?" cried M. Joinville.

"We will have to show this strange ship, which is said to be a pirate, that we do not care for visitors of that description just now."

The captain's countenance fell a trifle.

Crozat opened again the letter he had just received from Bienville.

"You may read what the governor says," and he placed the message in Joinville's hands.

The captain of the *Dauphin* glanced at the communication and lost color.

"What is it, my dear Joinville?" cried Crozat, as he noticed the change from red to white.

"If this is true—but, perhaps, his excellency is mistaken—there is a bad man at our gates."

"But you have just said that we are strong enough to take care of ourselves."

"Yes, but——"

"What is it, man?" roared Crozat. "You don't fear Capt. Kidd with your fleet?"

Joinville knew he had lied.

There were not ten serviceable guns in the whole fleet.

It was a useless fleet so far as its fighting qualities were concerned; it traded in slaves and spices, enriching its owner, but it hadn't a fighting rascal on any of its decks.

"Speak out," cried Crozat. "Tell me what has suddenly chased the color from your cheeks."

"I may be mistaken concerning some of our cannon," was the other lie. "In fact, we have done so much peaceful work that I haven't looked after the guns—not for some time, I mean."

"Then you think——"

"Pardon me, your excellency," put in Joinville. "I don't know what to think till I've inspected the fleet."

"If Capt. Kidd, the blood-stained marauder of the sea, is in the bay——"

"I can't think it. The last I heard of Kidd he was somewhere in the North Atlantic looking after the Spanish galleons. We spoke a vessel on our last voyage from which I obtained this information."

"Which may have been false," said Crozat, still full of his fears. "One cannot believe all one hears nowadays."

"That is true," and the captain rose. "I will attend to this matter at once."

As he opened the door Crozat was confronted by his niece, a handsome girl of nineteen, and at the time the belle of New Orleans.

Her face was white.

"What is it, Mathilde?" asked the shipowner.

She could not speak for a moment.

Crozat took her in his arms and tried to kiss her fears away.

"The pirates!—they are—in—the bay!" she said, at last.

"Tush! Have no fears. M. Joinville here has promised to drive them off with our good guns, and in a short time there will be no pirate flag in the gulf."

But half quieted, Mathilde turned to the silent captain of the trading fleet and looked at him.

"You will drive them off?" said she.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I shall be so glad. Do you know, uncle, I have dreamed about these rogues of the sea——"

"Foolish dreams!" broke in Crozat. "We are too strong for them all, and our fleet is good enough for half a dozen tremendous battles wherever we can find the rascals."

Joinville was anxious to get away.

"You will report to-morrow," said Crozat. "You will look over your armament again and see that everything is ready for the battle. By my life! we don't intend to let this Capt. Kidd get a foothold in the city."

"It is Capt. Kidd?" cried Mathilde. "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

The beauty almost swooned.

"He is the greatest robber of the seas," she shrieked. "He never spares age or sex. He is the monster of the ocean, and to think that he has come thither to plunder and kill in New Orleans."

"It shall not be," said Crozat. "Just let Capt. Kidd try to take the town and we will reap the rich reward the British king has offered for his head."

"But M. Joinville's cannon may miss," wailed Mathilde.

"Never!" lied Joinville, with agility. "I shall give a good account of the fleet, *ma chere*."

"See that you do," and Mathilde put out her jeweled hand, which the captain of the fleet took and lifted to his lips. "When you have defeated and destroyed Capt. Kidd you may come to us for your reward. Is it not true, my uncle?"

"Aye, that he may," cried Crozat, as he led the way to the door to let Joinville out.

He bade his fleet captain adieu on the steps of the mansion.

When he re-entered the large room in which his guests were assembled he was plied with a thousand questions.

Where was the pirate? Had Capt. Kidd really come to New Orleans? What was he—Crozat—going to do? Had Bienville taken any measures for the defeat of the sea robber?

To all of which the old trader lied as glibly as Joinville had done.

He said that it was not believed that Capt. Kidd had had the audacity to enter the bay.

Bienville was unduly excited and his fears had magnified a little ship into the bulky pirate with her frowning ports.

But it happened to be the *Red Raven*—and Crozat's voice assumed magnificent proportions now—he would stand responsible for the city's safety.

He had a fleet at his command.

His vessel carried the best cannon extant. He never boasted of these things before—not he—but now he could speak of them with confidence.

In fact, he hoped Kidd had come.

He wanted to rid the seas of this man-monster; he would sweep him from the water and henceforth the name of Kidd, the merciless, would be but a memory.

The guests listened to these words with varying emotions.

Some excused themselves and quickly left the mansion.

Others remained a while longer, but inside of an hour Crozat was alone with his niece, the fair Mathilde.

An hour passed away.

Then there came a rap, an excited one, on the front door of the mansion.

Crozat opened it in person.

"What!" he cried, at sight of the man on the steps.

"Another message from the governor?"

He seized the paper which had been handed forward and invited the servitor into the house.

The fellow sulked inside and stood against the wall.

M. Crozat drew back into a little room and opened the letter in the light of the lamp.

He uttered a cry as the sheet was spread out before him.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said, and then he looked around, for he had caught the swish of skirts, and Mathilde stood beside him.

"From De Bienville?" questioned the girl, as her gaze fell upon the paper.

"No," was the answer. "It is from—have no fears, my dear—it is from the—the—pirate."

Mathilde shrieked.

"For you from Capt. Kidd?"

"Yes."

Crozat crushed the paper in his hand.

"Remain here," he cried to the pallid girl, who had fallen against the wall. "It is nothing. We will send out the fleet to-night yet. We——"

"I think it is useless," said the man who had come to the door and was looking into the chamber. "The *Red Raven* is at the docks."

Crozat turned upon him with a look of blank rage.

"At the docks?" he gasped. "Capt. Kidd?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you——"

"I belong to the *Red Raven*. I come direct from Capt. Kidd."

"But my fleet? How did your captain reach the docks—without getting blown out of the water?"

The buccaneer smiled.

"Your fleet is worthless, M. Crozat. They couldn't stop a swarm of gnats, to say nothing of a vessel like the *Red Raven*."

The Frenchman looked at Mathilde. She was standing at the table, colorless.

CHAPTER V.

THAD AND HIS CHUMS IN NEW ORLEANS.

The *Red Raven* had slipped through the meshes and was at the docks of the Crescent City.

Thad and his chums had witnessed the entrance and they were surprised at the entire lack of resistance.

No one had barred their progress.

The pirate ship had come to anchor in a secluded spot and Capt. Kidd had sent a messenger, not to Bienville, the governor, whom he held in contempt, but to Anthony Crozat, the richest man in the town, a veritable nabob.

He waited on the poop deck for the return of his messenger.

He came back shortly after midnight.

The man had nothing in his hands.

He reported that Crozat had been too frightened to indite a letter.

He added that he had a niece named Mathilde, one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, a girl who at first had almost fainted, but who in the end drove him from the house like a tigress, and the man averred he was satisfied to come off without having his eyes scratched from his head.

Kidd laughed at this.

"We're safe here," said the captain of the pirate. "We have cowed them already. We can whip any fleet they have in the bay or the surrounding waters."

Kidd resolved to wait till morning before he went further in his adventure.

A watch was set on the *Red Raven's* decks and the men ordered to turn in.

It was a novel situation for our friends.

They had never before been in the gulf, which they had crossed from the Caribbean, nor had they ever expected to see the flag of the *Red Raven* flying unopposed before New Orleans.

They had heard much about the city above the delta of the great river, but they had also heard that it was well guarded.

It could not be so, for they had reached the docks without a fight and the inhabitants seemed the veriest of cowards, men who were afraid to oppose the one vessel of the sea scourge.

The lads did not know what the next day would bring forth.

They waited with a good deal of anxiety for the first flushes of the dawn, and when the east reddened they cast a quick glance around.

The *Red Raven* had anchored off one of the largest docks.

She lay almost in the midst of a fleet of ships of various sizes, and Kidd looked at them all and smiled.

"Trash!" said he. "We can blow every one of them out of the water. It wouldn't take more than one broadside to a ship, and they are only tubs."

Dragon laughed till his sides ached as he regarded the situation.

The big fellow turned to Hugo and pointed at the largest of the vessels, which was the *Dauphin*, and laughed again.

Most of the ships in the little bay floated the flag of France at their mastheads.

The decks looked clean enough, for the Frenchman is strong on cleanliness, and Kidd said he thought all would surrender without a fight.

"But where's the spoil to come from?" asked Dragon, turning to the captain of the *Red Raven*.

"Mostly from the city—from the coffers of De Bienville and M. Crozat. Of course, they're rich enough to make us happy for a whole year."

"But they may resist, captain?"

"With what?" sneered Kidd. "They haven't got a cannon that could bore a hole through a cheese, and, as for soldiers, they have a few toys called men in the uniform of France."

In a short time the captain's boat was lowered over the side of the *Red Raven* and Kidd prepared to enter the city.

"Come along," he said to Thad and his chums as he

saw them watching him. "This will be a treat for you. We are going to see the town."

The boat put off with Kidd standing prominently in the stern sheets with his arms folded on the breast of the famous red coat, and wearing the Silver Cutlass at his side.

The craft cut the water and landed its human freight at the main dock.

Kidd leaped ashore and the others followed.

He had ten of his best men at his back besides the three boys.

Dragon and Hugo were with him; and as he looked at his guards a smile came to the corners of his mouth.

A few darkies, who were bold enough to remain, greeted the party.

Kidd stepped up to one of these and chucked him playfully under the chin.

"Where is your governor?" asked the pirate.

"Him no come down, massa," said the slave. "Him at home, I guessum."

"Well, I didn't expect to be welcomed in state," said Kidd. "I have a sneaking notion that M. De Bienville is not pleased over this morning call. He's well, I hope?"

"Well as common, massa. Him great man."

"Oh, yes; we'll increase his greatness, maybe," smiled the buccaneer. "Which way to his mansion?"

The black pointed in a certain direction and then darted away.

The streets were strangely deserted.

Thad and his friends took particular note of this, and believed that it boded ill.

The little band advanced down the narrow street leading to Bienville's residence.

"Hang me, but I don't quite like this quietude," whispered Dragon to the hunchback. "They mean something. If they attempt anything we'll leave the town in ashes and the maidens all kissed."

"That we will, Brother Dragon," was the reply. "I fancy there are some pretty ones here."

"The Creoles! ah, the Creoles!" cried Dragon, smacking his lips. "They are perfect angels."

"What think you, Thad?" asked Simon, as they turned into another street exactly like the former one. "Where are the inhabitants of New Orleans?"

"I can't say, Simon. But I don't like the looks of things. I have caught sight of faces at the windows, but they vanish the moment you get a squint at them. They don't want us to see them. Look at that face across the street now, at the upper window."

Simon turned his head, but Thad exclaimed:

"It's gone already."

Presently Kidd saw a man run out of a house a little ways ahead and he hailed him.

"Halt or I fire," said Kidd, and the man stopped in the middle of the street.

He was trembling like an aspen leaf when the pirates came up.

"What means all this silence?" demanded Kidd.

"The people are in their houses."

"Why?"

"If you are Capt. Kidd you ought to be able to answer the question yourself."

"Are they afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"And the governor? Will he oppose us?"

"I—I think not."

"Where is your armory?"

The citizen pointed down the street.

"How many soldiers have you in the city?"

"The regiment of the King's Guards."

"Ho! ho! the men who never fight," laughed Kidd.

"It's all in the name."

They took the citizen with them.

He pointed out the mansion of the governor, a fine place, standing back of a hedge of beautiful magnolias.

"Does he live alone?" asked Kidd.

"With his household and his slaves."

"Yes. Has he guards in the house?"

"He may have this morning."

Kidd glanced at his followers.

"Come along," he commanded, and the little party turned into the governor's park.

Kidd led his men to the steps of the fine old mansion and struck the door with his fist.

It was opened by a white-faced man.

"Where is his excellency?" asked the captain of the buccaneers.

"He is not in. He has gone over to M. Crozat's house."

"Two birds with one stone," said the pirate, with a satisfied laugh.

He made the servant show them how to reach the trader's mansion, and then they went away.

"This is easy," smiled Kidd, glancing over his shoulder at Dragon, who was at his heels.

"Too easy," was the reply.

"It means something," said Thad to Simon and Oliver. "It is all right now, but just wait. These rascally French are up to something and we will see——"

It was not far to M. Crozat's house.

Now and then shutters were opened a little to enable those behind them to catch sight of the dreaded pirates.

When they were closed before any of Kidd's crew could make out the faces of those behind.

All at once the band halted in front of one of the largest houses in the old Crescent City.

It was the home of its nabob, M. Crozat.

"This is the place," said Kidd, with a gratified look. "We shall soon see how our friend M. Crozat lives in the New World."

His knock brought no response.

Kidd frowned and knocked again.

"The fools! Don't they know that Capt. Kidd is at their doors?" he roared in his rage. "This is too much. Here, Mr. Dragon, open the door for us."

The men drew off a pace and Dragon, bracing himself, rushed against the door like a bull, and struck it with his gigantic shoulders.

The rush was irresistible.

The door creaked on its hinges and then tumbled inward.

Kidd uttered a shout of approval and sprang forward.

"Come on, my hearties!" he cried to those behind him.

"We will take possession of M. Crozat's house, and I dare say his cellars contain excellent wine."

No one greeted the pirate.

He halted in the wide hallway and looked around.

Presently he heard the sound of music and all looked at one another.

"It's this way," cried Dragon, as he darted down the corridor. "It must be the beauty the man saw last night."

Guided by the sounds of music the first officer of the *Red Raven* opened a door at his right and then staggered back with a cry.

He had come upon Mathilde, M. Crozat's niece, at her harp, and she played on without taking the slightest notice of the pirate.

In another moment Capt. Kidd and Hugo were also gazing into the chamber, but Mathilde did not see them.

"Is she deaf?" said Kidd.

"No, just absorbed," answered Dragon, and before Kidd could restrain him, he had entered the room and touched the girl on the shoulder.

With the quickness of a cat Mathilde turned upon him.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I am the famous Dragon and this is my captain—Capt. Kidd."

"You!" cried the French girl, looking up into Dragon's face without the slightest sign of fear.

"Where's M. Crozat?" asked Capt. Kidd.

Mathilde rose and stood before them like a queen.

"My uncle has gone away," said she.

"Whither?"

"I cannot tell you, sir," She was looking straight into Kidd's eyes.

"You mean that you will not?" snapped the pirate, who was impressed with the girl's wonderful beauty and coolness.

"Take it as you please, sir," Mathilde said. "So you are the famous Capt. Kidd? I'm glad to have met you, sir. What do you expect to do here?"

Kidd was taken aback at her audacity, as he called it.

"We have come to pay the town of New Orleans a visit. We have never been here. So M. Crozat is gone away?"

"Yes. Wait a moment."

Mathilde opened a little door set in the wall by means of a hidden spring.

The pirates saw her put her head beyond the room and a moment's silence followed.

"It is all right, Jules," she called out in French. "You can fire the fuse!"

Kidd and his followers recoiled with cries of terror.

"We've got them in the house, Jules," continued Mathilde, speaking to some one unseen. "We've got Capt. Kidd in the trap. Fire the fuse, Jules, and we'll all go up together."

There was a rush for the door—all but the captain of the *Red Raven*.

Thad and his chums were crowded into the hall by the rush of Dragon and the others.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUNGEON OF MONSIEUR CROZAT.

The very coolness of the Frenchman's niece startled Capt. Kidd.

He had never seen anything just like it.

The men who tumbled into the hall, anxious to get beyond reach of the doom that threatened, were full of fears.

Kidd himself stood his ground.

He could not believe that the beautiful girl intended to destroy herself and the mansion.

He looked at her and thought he caught the semblance of a smile at her finely chiseled lips.

Kidd laughed.

"Why doesn't your menial fire the fuse?" he asked.

Mathilde stood like a statue in the middle of the luxurious chamber.

Her face was white and her hands were clasped.

"Come," bantered the buccaneer, "fire the fuse and see how we go up together."

Mathilde did not answer.

"You hesitate, my fair one," continued the pirate. "If you only knew how anxious I am to be blown up with an angel like yourself you would hasten the catastrophe."

Suddenly the girl seemed on the point of swooning.

Kidd sprang forward and caught her before she could reach the floor, then he called to his men.

"It was only a ruse to frighten us out of the house," said he.

Dragon and his men came back.

Thad and his chums crossed the corridor and entered into another apartment.

They found themselves in a large place with a lofty ceiling and well furnished, evidently the banquet room.

"Come," cried Thad, "let us explore a little. We cannot assist the girl. We may save the others."

They bolted across the room and entered another not quite so large, but furnished in the most splendid style.

"The parlor, I take it," said Thad. "Where does this door lead? Monsieur Crozat would not abandon the house and leave his daughter to her fate, if she is his child."

The boys passed through the second room and found a flight of steps beyond the door.

"They seem to lead to the vaults—the very place where a Frenchman would take refuge," said Thad.

The steps did lead to the wine vaults.

The boys plunged downward and were stopped by a door of solid oak.

It was not locked, and they entered.

"It's as dark as the Styx!" cried Simon, as the door swung shut behind them.

"Open the door," answered Thad. "This may be an ambush."

"It's worse than that!" roared a voice in the darkness, and the next moment the boys were attacked by some enemies who wielded great staves that felled all three before they could draw a weapon.

The fight did not last more than a moment.

"Shut the door now," said a strange voice.

Thad and his chums were lying on the floor almost senseless from the blows of the merciless staves.

They had not had a chance to fight, for they could not see their foes.

Then a light flashed in their faces.

They saw half a dozen stalwart men, evidently servants, who snarled at them as they held the light close to their faces.

"They're young rats," said the voice they had heard before. "We have them safe."

"Who are you?" asked Thad, as he gazed into the faces above them.

"You'll find out pretty soon," was the reply, in French. "What fools you were to come down here, anyhow!"

"Do you belong to M. Crozat?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. You will free us or feel the vengeance of Capt. Kidd."

At this the others set up a laugh.

"Free you? I guess not," said the leader of the gang. "We intend to show you how we treat pirates in New Orleans."

Seeing that the men were not to be frightened with threats of vengeance, Thad desisted from further addressing them and relapsed into silence.

In a little while they were lifted from the cold stone flagging and borne from the scene of their discomfiture.

Five minutes later they were thrown down in a stone-walled room, the dimensions of which they could see by the light of the lanthorn.

"We'll come back sometime," spoke the captain of the servitors. "You can have the place to yourselves, and I hope you'll enjoy the situation."

There was no reply.

When the men went away Simon rolled over and looked at his friend and leader.

"This is a pretty pickle," said the Dutch boy. "I never expected to get into anything like it in New Orleans. They will return and make short work of us."

"They will, if they can," observed Thad, who under no circumstances permitted himself to become wholly discouraged. "We must take things as they come, Simon, and—"

"But I don't like to do it when they don't come our way," groaned the Dutch boy.

Thad smiled.

"Every cloud has a silver lining," he whispered, but Simon only averted his face and groaned.

"If the captain misses us he will ransack the house for his 'young rats,' as Dragon calls us," said Oliver.

"But we've not been left in the house," put in Simon. "Don't you know how they carried us from the cellar where we were taken prisoners and brought us to this hole in the earth?"

"Yes."

"Seems to me this is to become our common grave."

"Time will tell," and Thad looked away in thought, hoping to catch somewhere the glimmer of a light.

"I would like to know what the captain did with the girl at the harp. She was as cool as a cucumber, and when she told some one to fire the fuse she looked absolutely perfect."

"But the fuse wasn't lighted. We would have had the explosion before this had it been."

The three boys moved round the walls of their subterranean prison and felt the stones.

They could find the door by which they had entered the place, but it was as unyielding as a door of adamant.

"It's no use," said Simon. "We're in a trap."

But Thad did not despair.

They might have to wait a long time before they would be visited, but he was sure they would not be left to die there.

More than an hour passed.

At last they heard a key turn in the lock.

"They're coming," whispered our young hero.

The door swung open in the dark.

The boys heard a heavy footstep, and then a light flared in their faces from the open aperture of an iron lanthorn.

"They're here yet," said a voice, evidently addressing some one. "I knew they could not get out of this dungeon."

There was a swish of skirts and Thad and his friends

looked up into the face of the girl who had played as they entered M. Crozat's mansion.

She gathered up her dainty skirts as she came forward, so as not to sweep up any of the grime of the floor, and leaned forward.

The boys looked up into her sternly set face and admired the gleaming blackness of her eyes.

"How do you like it, young sirs?" she said, looking at Thad as she spoke.

Thad showed his teeth in a grin.

"It's not the nicest place in the world," he said. "We've seen better ones."

"Doubtless," said Mathilde. "You were bold in coming to M. Crozat's house. You're young pirates, aren't you?"

"You can call us what you please," Thad replied. "We serve Capt. Kidd."

The girl turned to her sole companion, a tall young man of two-and-twenty.

"What think you of that, Jules?" she cried. "They admit that they are freebooters."

"Why not tell the truth?" confessed Thad. "You saw us come in with Kidd, and we would not be with such a man if we were not in his service."

"Marry me, but that is true!" cried Mathilde.

"Marry you?" blurted Simon. "That's a pretty go. But I'll do it if you let us out of this hole in the ground."

Mathilde turned upon the Dutch boy and bade Jules hold the light close to his face.

Simon stood the girl's scrutiny with a good deal of composure.

"Who is he?" she asked, turning suddenly upon Thad.

"It is Simon Van Twiller, of New York——"

"And a better family never existed," broke in the Dutch lad. "I dare you to beat it, miss. If you conclude to marry me, you must first let all three of us out of this pickle——"

Mathilde broke the boy's sentence by gathering up her skirts again and falling back.

"I said nothing about marrying you," she cried. "That would be the last thing I would ever think of."

"That's a great relief, 'pon honor it is!" sighed Simon, in a ludicrous manner.

Mathilde looked at the Dutch boy and then at Jules.

"What sport he would make at one of M. Crozat's banquets!" she remarked.

Jules nodded.

"Tell me," cried Simon, "when are you going to have a banquet? If you invite us, we'll give you lots of amusement."

"He's queer," the girl exclaimed. "I really like the Dutch boy," and she turned away.

Mathilde next addressed herself to our young hero, and Thad told her that the *Red Raven* had come to New Orleans for plunder.

"But you are my captive," she cried. "I will hold Capt. Kidd off with you."

"You don't know the captain of the *Red Raven*."

"He will not take a pistole if he understands that the moment he does you will die."

"Try him," said Thad. "Capt. Kidd is not to be trifled with. If you hope to secure immunity by threatening to take our lives you reckon without your host."

"We shall see, monsieur. I am Mathilde Crozat, niece of M. Crozat, the rich trader."

"I thought so, only I half believed that you were his daughter."

"He has no children," said the fair girl. "M. Crozat is the richest man in the New World. He trades everywhere, holding his license from the king of France."

"We have heard of his fleet."

"I cannot understand why the cannon on some of his ships did not keep your barque out of the city."

"My dear young lady," said Thad, "the cannon you speak of cannot fire a shot. They haven't been fired for years."

"But my uncle told me that they were the finest guns in the world."

"Some one has hoodwinked him, that's all," and Thad looked away, not wishing to note Mathilde's embarrassment.

In another minute the girl made a sign to Jules, and the pair went toward the door.

"I'll return," she called out over her shoulder. "I don't like pirates. They would plunder my uncle's ships, and I am his heiress."

"Oho, I see!" Thad exclaimed. "That's the milk in the cocoanut, is it?"

Mathilde laughed merrily.

Simon, who understood French but imperfectly, asked Thad what the girl had said, and our hero explained.

"Well, tell her that between Simon Van Twiller and herself there's no love lost," cried Simon, as he looked at the girl standing in the doorway with the lanthorn light on her oval face.

Mathilde burst into a laugh at Thad's translation of the Dutch boy's remarks.

She then threw a kiss at Simon, who shouted that he wanted no foolishness like that, and he would have started forward had not Thad held him back.

"What would you have done, my Dutch tiger?" cried Thad, as Simon saw the door shut in his face.

"I'd have thrown her against the wall and broken every bone in her body! I don't want French kisses; Dutch ones for Simon Van Twiller, if you please. Did she lock the door?"

"Yes; I heard the key turn."

"Then we're doomed," cried Simon, as he settled back. "This isn't half as good as dying on the *Red Raven's* deck. Who'd have thought that we came across the sea to perish in the dungeon of a Johnny Crapeau? It's not giving the Van Twillers, the Ferguses and the Wades a fair chance," and Simon became moody and did not speak again.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW A BEAUTY DEFIED THE SEA WOLF.

Capt. Kidd and his men did not miss Thad and his chums for some time.

They hastened out of the house after Mathilde told them that the man they wanted to see was not there, and in a little while the pirate band was again traversing the streets of New Orleans.

The whole place was now aware of the raid of the buccaneers, and those who did not care to meet them remained indoors.

All at once Capt. Kidd turned to Dragon, and exclaimed:

"Where are the boys?"

"What!" cried the first officer of the *Red Raven*, "the young rats, captain?"

"Thad and his friends."

"We left them in the house of Crozat, but they've probably gone back to the boat."

Kidd shook his head.

"I cannot think," said he, "that they would desert us in this manner. They may have been driven from the house by the fear of an explosion, but they must be near it still."

The pirates concluded not to look for the three boys, and that is why they were left to their fate in the dungeon of the Frenchman.

The raid on New Orleans had spread terror on every hand.

The inhabitants wondered why Crozat's ships had not tried to check the course of the freebooters, for they did not know that the fleet was practically helpless, and when they looked over the surface of the water they wondered again.

There lay the *Red Raven* within hail of the town, and now and then the most fearless came down to the docks to take a look at the unwonted sight.

De Bienville and Crozat did not appear.

Mathilde had escaped the clutches of Capt. Kidd owing to her beauty and address, and still inhabited the mansion.

The captain of the *Red Raven* went back to the dock and thence to the vessel.

When he discovered that neither Thad nor his chums had put in an appearance he raved and stormed.

"Back to the town!" he cried. "We will find the boys. They have fallen into a trap, and in that house."

The boat was sent back with Kidd in the stern sheets and Dragon, frowning, near at hand.

"I'll burn the place," threatened the pirate captain. "I'll lay New Orleans in ashes if I cannot get my young tigers."

He was capable of carrying out his threat, and as he neared the dock his face grew dark.

Back again to the mansion of the Crozats he went.

A strange silence hung about it.

Kidd mounted the steps and struck the heavy door with the butt of his pistol.

No one answered the summons.

Again the pistol struck the portal, and this time, after a little silence, the door swung open.

The face of a Creole looked out at Kidd.

"You?" said the servant, drawing back. "We thought you had departed."

"But we've come back," replied the pirate. "Where's your master?"

The man shook his head.

"Don't tell me that you don't know," raged the captain of the *Red Raven*.

"Shall I call her?"

"The witch of the place? Yes."

The Creole vanished, and in a few moments the handsome face and figure of Mathilde came into view.

Kidd raised his plumed hat in deference and looked searchingly at the French girl.

"What is it, now?" asked Mathilde, drawing her figure to its full height, while she looked defiantly into the eyes of Capt. Kidd.

"Your uncle?" said the buccaneer.

"He is not here."

"Not in the mansion?"

"Not in the mansion, sir."

"Then we'll take the boys."

Mathilde's look seemed to become a stare.

"The boys, *monsieur le captain*?" she cried. "What boys?"

"My young tigers! They are somewhere in durance in this place. I mean Thad and his chums. They are the young fighters of the *Red Raven*, and came thither with us."

The girl recoiled a step.

"Come, you can't frighten us away by any commands to Jules. There is no fuse to light. We know that now. You have laid no train, for you never intended to blow up the mansion. Ha! is that not true, my beauty?"

A smile gathered at the girl's mouth and she looked away for an instant.

"The boys, as you call them," she said, "are not in this house."

"Ask her about the dungeons underneath the house," said a voice behind Kidd.

Mathilde heard the voice and started slightly.

"What about the secret places connected with the house?" asked Kidd.

Mathilde had recovered her composure, and was again looking the pirate squarely in the face.

"Do you think this is Le Bastille?" she said.

"Nay, but some of your houses in the New World are little better. I've heard of them, and in my time have threaded some of the underchambers of those places."

She did not reply to this.

"Come!" cried Kidd, stamping his foot impatiently, "we cannot remain here all the time waiting on the motion of your lips. Where are the three boys?"

Mathilde backed against the wall, and from there looked at the man who confronted her.

She was silent now.

"Never mind," said Kidd, suddenly, through his teeth. "We'll burn the house."

Still there was no answer from the niece of Crozat.

"Get ready the torch," resumed Kidd, looking over his shoulder at Dragon. "We will see what sort of rats run out of this French nest. If the boys are in it they will come out and——"

Mathilde started and laid her hand on the freebooter's arm.

"If you dare!" said she, sternly. "If you dare, *monsieur*!"

"Oh," laughed Kidd, "I dare anything."

Dragon picked his flints, while one of the other men took some tow from underneath his belt.

The girl watched these preliminaries with silent interest.

As the little light flashed up, Kidd moved toward the door leading into the room where the French girl had been first seen and opened it.

"In here," he said, with a motion to Dragon. "Here are some nice lace curtains from France, I presume. They will start the fire."

"They will burn nicely, *monsieur le captain*," said a voice behind him.

Kidd turned and looked into the calm face of Mathilde at the door.

"You want us to burn the house, then?"

"You have said you intend to burn it."

"But it is your home, mademoiselle?"

"I was born in this house."

"And you will see it destroyed?"

"Why not?" How can I save it from the vengeance of a pirate captain?"

Kidd was astounded.

"By revealing the dungeon of my young tigers."

A smile came back to the white lips of Crozat's niece. She slipped past Kidd and tore the fine curtains from the high windows.

Piling them in the center of the room she turned again to the startled pirate.

"Where is the fiend with the light—the devil with his fire?" she asked, looking round for Dragon.

"Here!" cried that worthy, as he came forward.

Dragon thrust forward the burning tow and stole a glance at his captain.

Mathilde looked the impersonation of rage and defiance as she stood in the middle of the room with a baneful light in her eyes.

"One moment, Dragon," said Kidd, as he turned again upon the cool beauty. "This is not natural. One does not care to see one's home set afire. This young lady will tell the truth. She will reveal the dungeon of Thad and his friends——"

"There are the curtains, *monsieur le capitain*. They will flash up and the woodwork will speedily catch. Then the house will go up in one great fire."

Mathilde laughed as she finished.

Kidd's wonderment increased.

He had never seen anything like this in all his wild career.

He glanced from the girl to his men.

"Why don't you burn the house?" asked Mathilde.

"It is your home, mademoiselle. It is the home of your birth, and one always honors that place."

"At last!—— It is nothing to me, sir," cried the girl. "You are but a wild sea wolf. You have killed and burned before. Why, then, should you hesitate now?"

Kidd gnashed his teeth and waved his hand to Dragon.

"The torch!" he said. "Let the curtains feed the flames."

Mathilde stepped back as Dragon, with a fiendish leer on his face, darted past her.

The fire touched the fine curtains, which flared up as if they were tinder.

Kidd looked at her and then at the crackling flames.

She did not return the look, but her gaze was fastened on the blazing heap.

"She's cool," said Kidd to himself. "Can it be that she knows nothing of the three lads? I have dealt with many a woman before, but never with one like this."

The buccaneers drew off, for the fire was scorching the woodwork of the handsome room, and Kidd retreated to the door.

"Come!" he cried to Dragon. "Bring the girl with you."

Dragon put out his hand for Mathilde, but she slipped beyond his grasp.

"Bring her along, Mr. Dragon. We're not done with her yet."

In another moment the niece of old Crozat was in the grip of the first officer of the *Red Raven*.

She did not scream, but only looked at the bearded wretch while he dragged her toward the hall.

Meanwhile the fire was making headway.

The whole room was now filled with smoke, and in a little while the red demon would penetrate beyond the wall and the house would be doomed.

Mathilde was a mystery to the captain of the pirate barque.

She had exhibited no regret over the destruction of the mansion, standing coolly off while the fire did its work and now and then stealing a triumphant glance toward the mystified pirate.

"You have no heart, mademoiselle," said Kidd, approaching Mathilde.

"Why should I have a heart that would save an old house to please a sea wolf?"

Kidd did not speak.

"We must quit the place," he said to his men. "In a little while the house will be a roaring furnace. Come."

He strode away, leading his men, and Mathilde followed into the grove.

"It is all over. The home of your childhood will not last long. Where are my young tigers?"

The girl laughed. It was almost the laugh of a maniac.

"In there," and she pointed to the roaring flames that had now enveloped the building.

Kidd caught her arm and sank his fingers into the fair white flesh.

"In there, say you?" and he pointed at the burning house.

"Why not, *monsieur le capitain*?" cried the French girl. "You have asked so often for your young sea wolves. Go back among the ashes of M. Crozat's home and find them."

An oath broke over the pirate's lips.

"Nay, it is too late!" continued Mathilde. "What are you but a wolf who spares not? Think you that I would let your young spawn escape? No. They are yonder, I say. And you will find them dead in the dungeons of the Crozats!"

"Then into the fire you go—after them!" cried a voice behind Kidd, and in another moment Mathilde was lifted from the ground by Hugo's hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH CAPT. KIDD TURNS THE TABLES.

If the captain of the *Red Raven* had not thrown out his hand in the nick of time Mathilde would have been tossed into the flames by Hugo.

There was fury in the eyes of the hunchback, and it was not for love of Thad and his chums that he was taking vengeance, but he hated women with a hatred born of his wild, outlawed life.

But Kidd did not intend to devote the fair girl to such a terrible death. He forced Hugo to put her down, which he did with a mutter of reluctance.

"So they are yonder?" said the pirate captain.

"Yes."

"Not in the house?"

"Find them!"

In another moment Mathilde Crozat broke away and fled.

"Let her go," said Kidd. "We will not molest her now. If she has told the truth——"

The buccaneer paused, for the thought of the terrible doom of the three boys filled his heart with horror.

The fire was now leaping over the eaves of the house, which was like a raging furnace, and here and there stood little groups of people, mostly slaves, who watched the work of the pirates.

As yet, nothing had been heard of De Bienville and Crozat.

Capt. Kidd cared little for them now in his intense desire to rescue Thad and his chums.

"The soldiers!" suddenly rang out a voice, and the blacks who had been watching the fire scattered like a lot of sheep.

Sure enough the king's regiment had come, but the soldiers made no effort to attack.

Capt. Kidd and his followers looked at the soldiers for half a minute, and then the master of the *Red Raven* advanced coolly.

He looked imposing in his red coat with the Silver Cutlass at his side, and his face was as pleasant as a morn in May.

"What want ye?" he said, halting within a few yards of the ranks.

The commander of the regiment looked Kidd over for a few moments and then raised his sword.

"Are you the renowned Capt. Kidd?" he queried.

"I am Capt. Kidd."

"I am Col. Montmorency of the King's Guards," was the reply. "You have invaded the precincts of the king's domain. You have even destroyed a mansion belonging to the king's subjects."

"Just as if I care for the authority of a king!" sneered Kidd, with a hasty look over his shoulder at his men. "I am my own lord and king. What is it you want, my dear colonel?"

"The unconditional surrender of yourself and men."

"That's not much," rejoined Kidd, with a laugh. "Really you are not serious."

"Those are my orders."

"From whom?"

"The governor."

"So he is still in existence?" cried Kidd. "Where will I be able to see his excellency?"

"You will meet him after your surrender."

"Not before, my dear colonel?"

"No."

"Then I cannot surrender."

Col. Montmorency glanced down his ranks and pressed his lips together.

He was a young man of determined mien and one who did not fear the terror of the high seas.

The ranks of the king's regiment stood firm, and each hand gripped the musket with determination.

A moment's silence followed.

"Ready!" shouted the colonel.

Kidd bit his lips.

There was death in the command, and for the first time in his life the captain of the *Red Raven* seemed foiled.

He knew that the young colonel would not hesitate to open fire upon him.

What could he do with a handful of men against four hundred fellows with muskets in their hands?

Kidd looked for the last time at his men.

He saw the bearded face of Dragon and noticed in his

eyes a fierce light, which the muskets had only accentuated.

As for Hugo of the mismated optics, he stood near Kidd, his pistol cocked and ready to sell his life as dearly as possible.

Kidd knew that circumstances were against him.

Dragon bit his lips half through.

"We must perforce surrender," said Kidd.

The words fell like a thunderbolt upon Dragon's ears.

The big fellow glared like a lion at the soldiers.

"To the king's rabble?" he cried.

Kidd nodded.

"Come, Hugo, we will not surrender. It means death at the end of a rope."

"Nay," cried Kidd. "We are now the prisoners of the governor. You obey me, Mr. Dragon?"

"Never!"

But the muskets shifting at that moment, covered the two cronies in piracy.

Dragon looked at Hugo, and Hugo returned his glance in silence.

They were at the mercy of the king's men.

Kidd now advanced and handed the colonel his sword, after which he stepped back.

Three minutes later the whole town seemed to know that Capt. Kidd, the pirate, was a prisoner in New Orleans.

They were marched through several streets, followed by a mob of gesticulating, howling people, but the soldiers formed in a hollow square for their protection.

Kidd's face was set sternly.

"Show me your governor, who ran like a rabbit the moment I landed," he said to the colonel.

"You shall see him, *monsieur le capitain*," was the reply.

The mansion of Bienville was soon reached, and Kidd was conducted up the steps while his men were ~~handed~~ on the outside of the house.

"Nobody but the governor will do!" cried the pirate, between set teeth.

Montmorency nodded and escorted his captive into the house.

Capt. Kidd looked round upon the handsome furniture that betokened wealth, but he kept his best eye for the king's governor.

Suddenly a door opened and there stood before him the figure of a tall man dressed in sumptuous garments.

"De Bienville?" said Kidd.

"*Monsieur le capitain*," was the answer.

Both men bowed, but Kidd haughtily.

He held the governor of New Orleans in utter contempt.

"So you have come to see me?" said De Bienville. "I am glad to welcome you to the province."

"Let us not talk about that," returned Kidd. "I am here because I have surrendered to your man yonder," and he glanced at the young colonel.

"Oh, yes, *monsieur le capitain*—to Col. Montmorency."

"I care not what you call the uniformed rat. He had me at the mercy of his guns—"

"And he would have fired," broke in Bienville. "I gave him his orders."

"Of course. I understand. But I am here to say that if a hair of my head is harmed—if one of my men out yonder is punished—your town will be laid in ashes."

Bienville started.

"You must remember that you are my prisoner," he said, addressing Kidd.

"And you must not forget that the *Red Raven* is lying at your docks with her great guns double shotted, and that she will lay your rascally town in ashes unless——"

Kidd was interrupted by the opening of a door at his right, and he glanced at the person who had come in.

It was the beautiful Mathilde Crozat.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bienville. "Here is the renowned Capt. Kidd, long the terror of the sea, but safe in our hands at last."

The girl looked at Kidd in a manner which he could not misinterpret and took her station at one side of the room.

"You have heard me," cried the captain of the *Red Raven*. "If one of us is harmed the town will be laid in ashes by the guns of my vessel."

"Your vessel!" and Bienville laughed. "We can afford to see New Orleans burned for the pleasure we will have of hanging you and your sea wolves."

Kidd fell back to the door, but he did not take his eyes from the governor.

"Take them to the round prison, colonel," commanded De Bienville. "We will call a court-martial this very day. There's no need of putting off the little pleasure we have in store for the citizens of New Orleans."

The colonel of the King's Guards laid his hand on Kidd's arm, but he was shaken loose in a moment.

"One moment," said the pirate, speaking in low, quiet but determined tones as he shot a glance at Bienville. "Are you mad, monsieur?"

"Mad with triumph, *mon cher*," cried Bienville. "This is the red-letter day of my career. I have captured the renowned Kidd of the seas. He has walked into my trap——"

"Just as he will walk out of your trap!" roared Capt. Kidd, as he threw himself forward, and De Bienville, the governor of New Orleans, went to the wall, where he was held in a grip of steel while Col. Montmorency looked helplessly on.

It was all the work of a second.

Kidd's leap was so sudden that no one had had time to prevent it, and all the young officer could do was to gaze in amazement at the situation of the governor, whose eyes looked as if they were about to fly from his head.

Mathilde Crozat, who had witnessed the tiger leap of the buccaneer, stood for a moment like one paralyzed with fear.

She saw her governor and friend held against the wall while with his unengaged hand Capt. Kidd had drawn one of his pistols and was thrusting it against the white temple of De Bienville.

"Mercy! mercy!" groaned the governor.

"Now clear the way!" cried Kidd, as he wheeled upon the two breathless witnesses. "Let us out!"

Still pressing the cold muzzle of the weapon against De Bienville's head, he went toward the door, both Montmorency and Mathilde falling back, and in another second he was on the steps of the house, facing the soldiers and their prisoners.

"Release the men yonder!" cried Kidd, in stentorian tones. "Let my fellows go free."

The soldiers looked at one another and then glanced again at the pirate and his men.

Col. Montmorency had followed Kidd from the man-

sion and stood on the steps with cold sweat on his forehead.

He had never heard of such cool audacity as practiced by the old tiger of the sea.

"Command your men to liberate my men," said Kidd, with a quick glance at Montmorency. "I hold the life of your master in my hands. If my men are not released in one second, there'll be a dead governor of New Orleans on the ground at my feet. What care I for life? I've risked it a thousand times on the decks of vessels. Why should I hold it valuable now?"

"Mercy! mercy!" came from the lips of the menaced governor.

"Quick! I can't hold back my hand another second," said Kidd, sternly.

"Don't!" said Mathilde. "He dare not kill the governor."

The captain of the *Red Raven* only laughed at this, and the laugh emphasized his threat.

Col. Montmorency stepped to one side.

"Release the captives!" he commanded.

In another moment the ranks opened and Dragon and his friends stood free.

"Now release the governor," said the young commander to Capt. Kidd.

"Not just yet," and Kidd came down the wide steps, pulling the white-faced prisoner after him.

He walked over to his men and then glanced at the head of the regiment.

"You will find his excellency at the dock," said Kidd. "The first lifted musket will be the signal for his doom. We will kill him without a single scruple. Forward, march!"

Kidd spoke to Dragon and the others, and the little band moved toward the water.

Mathilde ran in front of the silent soldiers and pointed toward the retreating horde.

"They will get off," she exclaimed. "Capt. Kidd, wolf that he is, dare not kill the king's governor."

"He dares anything when his life is in jeopardy," responded the young colonel, and then he added to Mathilde in a whisper:

"He is not victorious yet. This is the last raid Capt. Kidd will ever make on New Orleans, for, by the souls of the saints! he is near the end of his rope."

Mathilde shook her head. She did not believe this if Kidd was permitted to regain the vessel.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK CROPPER TO THE RESCUE.

Let us return to Thad and his chums.

Left to themselves in the underground dungeon of the Crozat mansion, they had time to reflect on their desperate situation.

Of course they could not see what was taking place in the house and before it; they did not dream that Capt. Kidd had ordered its destruction, but before long they had a terrible notice served unexpectedly upon them.

A puff of smoke entered the dungeon.

The boys inhaled it and started back.

What did it mean?

Thad had recourse to his tinder box, of which they had not been deprived, and struck a light.

The smoke was curling round the little stone-walled cell.

"Where does it come from?" cried Thad, as he looked in every direction.

Simon and Oliver stood appalled.

"What if they are roasting us alive?" cried the Dutch boy. "That siren who wanted to marry me looks like one who would like to roast people she don't like——"

"She wouldn't go that far, I think, Simon," put in Thad. "She is a niece of M. Crozat's——"

"And a daughter of Jezebel!" was the interruption. "I never saw such black eyes in a human head. There's another puff, Thad!"

Simon was on his feet and he bounded across the dungeon and tried to discover how the smoke came in.

"I've found the crevice," he said, after a brief search. "It comes in right here, Thad."

"It's from the outside?"

"Yes."

Simon stood at the crack for a minute and then fell back.

"The house must be burning," he said.

"Who has fired it?"

"Who but the captain?"

"But why?"

"He wanted De Bienville and Crozat. You know the captain's vengeance?"

Thad did not have to answer that question.

Well did he know that the captain of the *Red Raven* was a man of vengeance.

The little puffs of smoke continued to enter the cell, and the boys watched them as they straggled across it and finally spread out along the ceiling.

Their strait was desperate, and they knew it.

If the mansion was on fire they would be buried in the cinders and probably left to perish.

The only door that opened into their prison was a door of iron, which they could never force and which might resist the fury of the fire.

Half an hour passed, and it was the most thrilling thirty minutes the three chums had experienced for a long time.

The smoke vanished at last.

It no longer crept into the dungeon, but had flitted away, leaving its nauseous odor behind.

The boys had no way of discovering whether the house had been destroyed or not.

But they concluded that Capt. Kidd and his band had fired it, probably for the purpose of smoking out De Bienville and Crozat, whom he wanted to capture.

Hour after hour passed.

The young captives of Mathilde did not lose heart, though they knew that the day was vanishing and that another night would soon spread its pall over town and bay.

What had become of Capt. Kidd? And had the *Red Raven* weighed anchor and put to sea?

The little crevice through which the smoke had come admitted a mere streak of light, but this gave out in time.

The day was gone.

Thad stood near the crack and breathed the bit of fresh air that came in.

"It is dark out there if that is the open," he said, with a look at his friend.

"Let's get out," and Simon, for the fiftieth time, tugged at the door.

Thad watched him for a few moments with a smile gathering at the corners of his mouth.

He knew that the Dutch boy's strength and courage were in vain.

At last Simon fell back with an oath and looked around.

"Wish I had the pretty serpent in here!" he growled.

"Mathilde, Simon?"

"Yes. I'd like to hold her against the wall yonder till her breath had left her body. She's not like the Dutch girls of old Manhattan Island. They never shut their sweethearts up in underground places. She won't come to oblige Simon Van Twiller, though. I will have to settle with her elsewhere and some other time."

As he spoke, total darkness fell.

Thad turned back to where his chums sat moodily on the stones.

"Is it really night again?" asked Oliver, disconsolately.

"It is night, Oil."

"A dark one?" asked Simon.

"Yes."

"Then he may come if he has heard of it."

Thad started a little.

"Who may come, Simon?"

"Jack."

"I don't know. Jack wouldn't know where to find us if he should invade the town."

"But Jack would not stop till he did know. There's a good deal of manhood in the ex-guardsmen."

"A bushel of it, for that matter," said Thad. "He is worth his weight in gold, and he never forgets a favor."

"If he hears of our mishap he will come," and with this Simon smiled for the first time in an hour.

Outside the night was dark.

Some people had come and looked at the ruins of Crozat's mansion and gone their way.

The old ship owner was not liked by all. He treated his slaves poorly, and now and then looked haughtily down upon those who had really helped him to much of his wealth.

On the other hand Mathilde was very well liked.

She was passionate and fiery at times when she wanted to carry a point, but she often lent a helping hand to the poor, and they liked her.

These people sympathized with her over the loss of her home, but they said that but for her they would laugh at the burning of the house.

The town was still thrilled by the last act of Capt. Kidd.

Everybody had heard how he had first surrendered to the King's Guards, and how he had held De Bienville,

the governor, between him and the soldiers, escaping to the *Red Raven*, which still, near the main dock, menaced all.

No one believed that the renowned sea wolf would sail away without showing his teeth again.

Kidd had not crossed the ocean to be beaten off by an incident like the one we have just narrated.

The powerful guns of the pirate barque were directed toward the town, and the inhabitants looked for them to open fire at any moment.

And if they did, the king's town would soon be a heap of ashes.

Mathilde, the shipowner's niece, came back to the ruins of the house after dark.

She was alone.

As she moved through the grove of trees she looked cautiously around, and at last reached a spot not far from the dungeon of Thad and his friends.

"They're still in the old trap," she said, in triumphant tones. "If Capt. Kidd and the others got away, I have the young ones in the hole. They must have smelled the fire and perhaps got a whiff or two of smoke, and they wonder what has become of their jailress. Ho! I have them in the cage—my pretty birds."

She was so intent on her reflections that she did not see the figure that glided toward her.

It flitted from tree to tree with the noiseless tread of a savage.

At last it paused and watched the figure of the girl intently, like a cat watching a mouse.

"That's the French girl—that's the niece of old Crozat," said the voice of the stranger, in undertones. "She's come back probably to look upon the ruins of her house and—I would like to tell her a thing or two."

Mathilde stooped at a certain spot and put her ear close to the ground.

"I thought I heard a voice," she said, aloud. "They might be talking to one another and——"

She rose as quickly and looked around.

The dark figure had left its last tree and sprang toward her.

Mathilde saw it when it was too late to break away, and in another second a strong hand held her wrist with a grip of iron.

The French girl recoiled the length of her human tether.

"Who are you?" she demanded, looking into the strange face that was thrust almost into her own. "Unhand me! I am the niece of M. Crozat——"

"If you were the child of the queen of France I wouldn't let you go," was the interruption.

"Then who are you?"

"Jack Cropper!"

Mathilde gazed again into the speaker's face, but shook her head.

"I never saw you before?" she said.

"This is our first meeting," was the reply. "I have just entered the town."

"From——"

"From the vessel."

"There are many vessels. Do you belong to one of my uncle's ships?"

"Oddsfish, no, woman!" exclaimed Jack, as he bent his body forward and looked searchingly into Mathilde's face.

"Then you must be a—pirate?"

"Yes, I am a pirate. I belong to the *Red Raven*, a good ship with a devil's crew."

Mathilde would have uttered a cry, but it seemed to die on her lips.

"What brought you thither?" she managed to ask.

"The boys—the three young heroes of the *Red Raven*. Where are they?"

There was no reply.

"The captain came back without them," continued the ex-guardsmen. "They came hither with him and were left behind. They came to this house, or what was once a house. You were here. They did not run out when the place burned. They are in one of your infernal underground prisons."

The girl would have torn herself from Jack's grip had she been able to do so, but as well might she have tried to break a rope of steel.

"And what should I know about your young pirates?" she said. "I care but little for any person of your kind. There were three of them, you say?"

Jack Cropper was not to be turned from his purpose by her words.

"Where are the boys?" he exclaimed. "It will do you no good to tell me lies."

"Lies?"

"Come!" Jack shook her hard. "I'll shake some of your pretty teeth out of your head if you lie any more. I come hither at risk of my life for the chums. I don't intend to go back without them."

He looked fiercely into the black eyes that regarded him.

Mathilde, the little tigress, saw that she had met her match.

"You're big and pretty," she said to Jack, with her sweetest French accent.

"Come! none of that. You can't catch me with honey or flattery."

Mathilde's countenance dropped.

"The boys!—the boys, at once!" and Jack suddenly caught her up and ran with her to where the ruins of the mansion lay a mass of red and glowing coals. "Into the fire you go, my bird, where you'll get your feathers singed and lose your infernal beauty!"

Mathilde could not cry out for very terror.

The next moment a voice seemed to reach Jack's ears from beneath him.

He put the French girl down, but did not loosen his grip while he listened for a repetition of the strange sound.

CHAPTER X.

FROM ONE DEATH TRAP TO ANOTHER.

The noise heard by Jack Cropper came from Thad and his friends in their underground prison.

Mathilde, who heard the same sounds, knew whence they came, but she merely looked at Jack as if to note the expression on his face while she feared in her heart that he would yet hurl her into the fire.

"That's the boys," said the ex-guardsman. "Where are they, girl?"

Crozat's niece did not speak.

"Come, we must find the lads. We don't want 'em to perish in one of your rascally traps. Show me the way or into the fire you go!"

This time the girl relented.

Perhaps it was the gleam in Jack's eyes.

"This way, then, monsieur," she said, turning away, for he had by this time loosened his grip. "If you want the young pirates you shall have them."

Mathilde led the way to a depression in the ground where, after scraping away some of the smoldering ruins of the mansion, a little flight of steps was found.

The French girl pointed at them in silence and Jack bounded downward.

He felt the heat through the bottoms of his shoes, but he did not care for that.

The iron door barred his way.

Putting his mouth close to the iron he shouted to the captives beyond it.

"It's Jack!" he heard the voice of Simon say. "I knew he would come. We're all right yet, Jack, but this hole isn't a land of beauty, by any means."

The sailor could not force the door, so he went back to Mathilde.

"The ax," he said.

She clasped her hands and pointed to the ruins.

"It's in there, eh?" cried Cropper.

He found a long and heavy pole, with which he turned again to the door.

He charged it like an ancient with his battering-ram.

At the third blow the door yielded, and another forced it open.

Thad and his chums came rushing out with glad cries at their deliverance.

At the same time the ship owner's niece turned and fled with a laugh.

"Let the pretty vixen go," said Jack, with a smile, as he turned again to the three lads. "She was forced to show me where you were or, by my life! I would have fed her fine carcass to the fire yonder."

"Hark! what is that?" ejaculated Thad, as sounds of a tumult came to their ears.

"There's a rumpus toward the docks," replied Jack. "I wonder if the captain's come back after you?"

All four started away, and as they turned into a narrow street they caught sight of a pushing, angry mob.

"It's the captain, and no mistake," remarked Jack, with consummate coolness.

On the night air rose the most discordant cries.

It seemed as if the whole town had risen against some enemy.

Cropper and his young companions halted and looked toward the wild mob.

"Down with the pirates!" came the surging and ever-increasing shouts. "Down with the scum of the sea! They are in the town. Kill 'em at sight!"

"They're behind us, too," said Oliver, as he caught sight of moving figures in the rear. "We shall be caught between two fires."

They were indeed in a desperate situation.

Placed between two mad mobs bent on destroying the men of the *Red Raven* who had landed, headed by Kidd and the relentless Dragon, our friends were in danger of losing their lives.

The crowd grew larger at every moment.

It seemed as if the whole city had caught the fever of the hour and was one great mob of fiends.

Lanterns flashed out everywhere and people rushed armed from every house.

Where but a short time before not a living being could be seen, thousands swelled the mobs, and all were shouting vengeance against the pirates of the rigolets.

There seemed no escape for our four friends.

Jack Cropper turned to an alley-like street and was about to lead them into its shadows when he drew back.

There were gleaming eyes and curses even there.

"This way, then," cried Thad, turning another way. "Here is a black-looking passage leading, Heaven knows where."

They started forward, but as they reached the mouth of the street there came from its depths a cry that halted them on its forbidding threshold.

It, too, was guarded.

"In a trap!" said our young hero, between his teeth. "There is no way but to cut our way through the mob."

By this time there was some firing down the main street, then cries of pain and vengeance, and Thad and his friends drew their weapons with a determination to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

"We'll make some of the fiends bite the dust, at any rate," said Simon. "This may be the last of the Van Twillers, but he will go down fighting to the last. It's in the blood."

They were seen by the foremost of the mob, and in another moment these were almost upon them.

The quartet stood at bay like a lot of tigers.

"If Kidd would only come," said Oliver, in low tones, "we then could present a more formidable front to our foes."

"We must not depend on the captain, but on ourselves," was the reply from Thad. "There's a house yonder that might screen us for a time and give us a breathing spell——"

"To the house, then, broke in Thad, and all darted toward the dwelling.

Thad, being first, threw wide the door and all four rushed inside.

Their act was perceived, and almost before the door closed they had the mob at their heels.

"Here's a barricade," cried Simon, as he found an iron bar resting against the portal. "And here's the place for it. Ha! we've got them out, anyhow."

The interior of the old house, which was two stories in height, was dark.

The four did not know which way to go, but Thad produced his tinder box and soon had a light.

The burning tow revealed a large room and a stairway that led to the upper floor.

The mob was thundering at the door.

Our friends listened a moment and then darted across the chamber.

Crash went the door behind them!

The rusty staples that held the iron bar in place had been knocked out and in poured the fiends of old New Orleans.

"This way," cried Jack, as he spied another door.

They crossed the room and entered another chamber almost as large as the first.

The mob was in the house.

As Jack closed the door behind him he was almost flung to the floor, for the tigers dashed in and were upon them.

"Fire!" shouted Thad.

Four pistols blazed in the faces of the mob and there were yells of pain.

This drove the enemy back for a moment.

It also afforded the beleaguered four a breathing spell.

They reloaded their pistols and turned again to the rear of the mansion.

In half a minute they were in a large garden of various flowers, principally magnolias.

"Which way now?" asked the Dutch boy.

"Come," responded Thad. "One way seems as good as another. We will not stop now."

They bolted across the spacious garden, now and then tripping on some unseen vines, but at last reached its walls.

The ground was more open there.

In a second they all stood in a dark alley and tried to make out one another's anxious faces.

"The whole town's aroused," said Oliver.

"It's a hotbed of violence. And, what is more, we are in the midst of it."

"To the dock, then."

"Think you, Simon, that the dock is not guarded?" cried Thad. "We are surely cut off from the *Red Raven*."

"Hist!" said a voice that startled the four. "What was that I heard just now?"

The four drew closer together.

The voice had come from a spot in front of them, though the speaker was unseen.

Thad leaned forward and thrust his pistol before his face.

Some new enemy was out there; he knew they had come almost face to face with a spy of Bienville's, perhaps.

"I'll attend to him," said the low voice of Cropper. "Wait for me here."

Jack vanished.

Five minutes later the waiting boys heard a half-suppressed shriek and Jack came back.

He held in his grip a squirming little man who now and then broke out in emphatic French.

"I've got the Creole lizard," hissed Jack, while he held his prisoner in front of him with one hand at his throat and the other at the pistol, which he pressed against the fellow's temples.

"I caught him crawling on the ground like all his kind."

"*Parbleu! monsieurs*, I meant no harm," stuttered the captive. "I was waiting for a girl."

"Waiting to turn us over to De Bienville and his mob," cried Jack, with a light laugh. "Who are you?"

"I am Le Ver."

"Oho! that means 'The Worm,' does it not?"

"As you please, monsieur."

"Worms should be crushed!" cried Jack, in return. "We will crush you unless you show us the way out of this trap."

The little man squirmed again in Jack's grip, but did not speak.

"Hand him over to me, Jack," said Simple Simon. "Let me give him his quietus."

"No. He'll talk when he finds his tongue, and he will act, too."

Le Ver did talk.

Perhaps it was the grip of the ex-guardsmen or the voice of Simon that loosened his tongue, but it was loosened.

"I'll show you, messieurs," he said.

His words were couched in a whine.

"Be quick about it! I hear the mob in the house. They'll be out here in a minute."

"This way," said the captive, and he pointed in a certain direction.

Jack still held his pistol at the man's head, for he did not intend to take any chances.

They went down the dark alley, which led them into a street almost as black.

The worm had been placed on the ground and was guiding them.

"To the docks," said Jack Cropper.

"But you'll find the docks watched, messieurs."

"It's the only way out of the trap. To the docks, I say. If they are watched we will fight for a boat."

This seemed to lend speed to the little man's limbs and he darted off again.

It took the party five minutes to reach the docks of the town.

They heard voices on both sides of them.

"There's a gap in the middle," said Thad. "We will take it."

They glided forward again and gained the edge of the water.

On either hand the mob was waiting for any pirates who might seek the docks in their efforts to escape.

It was still a ticklish enterprise.

Behind them raged the sounds of conflict, and our friends did not doubt that Capt. Kidd and his friends had collided with the royal guards.

"We must leave the captain to take care of himself for once," said Thad. "There's the outlines of a boat——"

"We must get it," broke in Jack, as he lowered himself over the edge of the gloomy wharf.

In half a minute he had pulled a good-sized boat toward him and it was found to contain oars in good condition.

"Into it, now," he said, in low tones. "No noise if you can help it."

"But the prisoner?" said Thad.

"We'll attend to him later on," grinned the ex-guardsmen, and in another second the boat held five persons.

"Cast off," said Jack Cropper. "Let's get out of this death hole as soon as possible."

Jack turned to the little man lying in the bottom of the craft.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

"No, messieurs."

Thad broke into a laugh.

"He's the first frog I ever saw that couldn't swim," he said. "He can swim like a fish, Jack."

"We'll try him, then."

Jack caught up the little man in his arms.

"You're going to take a bath, Le Ver," he said. "I'm good at tossing men into the water."

"Mercy, mercy, messieurs!"

"A bath won't hurt you, for you smell of garlic," laughed the big guardsman. "Now, over you go!"

The next moment something human shot from Jack's hands and there was a great splash in the dark waters of the night.

"He takes to it like a fish," cried Simon, as he caught sight of the struggling man in the element.

"Yes, and he said he couldn't swim."

"Now for the *Red Raven*," and the boat turned a little and struck out boldly.

A good deal of caution was still necessary, for the harbor was filled with shipping of all kinds.

They were obliged to steer clear of some of Crozat's vessels, but with Thad in the boat as watch and steersman the little craft was propelled through the water almost in silence.

They knew the anchorage of the *Red Raven*, but since they invaded the town the pirate had changed her moorings.

"She's gone," cried Simon. "The *Red Raven* has left us to our enemies!"

"No, she's only shifted a little," replied Jack. "We shall find her in a little while."

"Ah!" said Thad, a moment later. "There she is!"

The hull and sails of a large vessel had loomed out from the darkness against the starlit sky, and the boat was rowed toward it.

"Be sure you're right," whispered Oliver. "We don't want to make a mistake now."

The boat shot forward and in a little while ran under the bow of the vessel that had been sighted.

Jack and Thad strained their eyes as they came alongside on the port quarter.

Presently they were hailed by a watch overhead.

"It's the *Red Raven*," fell from Thad's lips. "We are all right at last."

In another moment the five were clambering up the rope ladder and Thad and Simon were the first to drop on the deck.

As they did so they recoiled with a cry, for they saw standing before them a tall man in French uniform.

"Heavens! the wrong ship!" cried our hero, as he fell against the rail.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNEXPECTED PRIZE.

The boat put off in utter silence.

It did not take it long to get beyond the dock, and then

Half a dozen men came up from below and started forward.

"What ship are you looking for?" asked the tall officer.

"The——"

Jack Cropper sprang forward before Thad could complete his sentence, and the officer went back with a blow of his fist.

"What ship is this?" cried the ex-guardsman, as he caught one of the foremost sailors and held him in a grip of steel.

"This is the *Queen of France*."

"Ha! one of Crozat's vessels?"

"Yes."

The little monosyllable thrilled our friends.

"Back to the hatch, every mother's son of you!" yelled Jack. "You are our prisoners!"

"Prisoners?" echoed the man, who had recovered from Jack's blow. "Who are you?"

"We are from Capt. Kidd's ship, the *Red Raven*. Back to the hatch and down below!"

At the points of their cutlasses and pistols Thad and his friends forced the astonished sailors below and batten down the hatches.

"What think you of our prize?" said Thad, as he looked at the grinning face of the ex-guardsman. "This is better than we could have hoped. It is Crozat's flagship, and she is a rich prize."

Just then a voice came up from below.

"It is the tall captain," cried Jack, as he bounded forward.

"~~Messieurs~~, will you let us up?" said the voice. "It is stifling down here."

"Shall I?" said Jack, with a glance at his companions.

"Let him up alone. He may be serviceable to us. But make the others remain where they are."

Up came the tall captain puffing and blowing.

"Your name?" demanded Thad.

"M. Joinville."

"What! the commander of Crozat's fleet of traders?"

"The same, monsieur."

Jack and Thad exchanged swift glances.

"What's your complement to-night?"

"Six-and-twenty men."

"Where are the others?"

"In the town trying to beat out Capt. Kidd."

"Good! Now, *monsieur le captain*," said Thad, "you will show us the way out of this tangle of ships."

"I, monsieur?"

"Why not?"

"M. Crozat will turn me over to De Bienville, who will shoot me."

"Oh, I assure you we care little for that," smiled our hero. "We want to get out of this nest of masts and rigging. All these vessels around belong to M. Crozat?"

"Yes."

"Which is the *Dauphin*?"

Thad had heard the names of some of the trader's vessels and he was anxious to know where they were.

"The vessel on our starboard is the *Dauphin*," said M. Joinville.

"A right good ship, I'm told," said our young hero.

"One of the best. She is not quite as large as the *Queen*, but she is a little newer."

"What are you loaded with, *monsieur le captain*?"

"Beads and other trinkets for the African trade."

"You were getting ready to go out, then?"

"To-morrow, sir."

"All the fleet?"

"Yes, all of us."

"Now you will show us out of this tangle of ships, as I have said," proceeded Thad. "You will not play us false, for it might go hard with you if you did."

"I must call some of my men up."

"Not a man! We're enough to man the *Queen*. Take the wheel yourself, captain. Oliver, stand by monsieur with a pistol at his head and at a word from me scatter his brains over the binnacle."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Oliver as he started toward the wheel with the Frenchman.

In a little while the *Queen of France* answered the helm and moved slowly away.

Biting his tongue half through, the captain of the trader stood like a statue at the wheel and knew that almost against his head was the pistol of the determined Oliver Wade.

Thad, with Jack and Simple Simon, stood on the poop deck watching the other ships, some of which they nearly grazed in their passage out, but not a word was spoken.

They were hailed once or twice by some of Crozat's ships, but Thad's answer satisfied them.

They expected to find that the *Red Raven* had changed her position to a certain place, and in this they were not disappointed.

"Did you hear what the captain said he was loaded with?" suddenly whispered the Dutch boy, as he laid his hand on Thad's arm.

"Yes, beads."

"Just the thing I've been looking for for months."

"You? What do you want with a lot of beads?"

"Aren't there Dutch girls in old Manhattan?" grinned Simon. "Katrina is a lover of beads——"

"But you're not likely to see her for a long time to come," interrupted Thad. "We are still a long ways from New York."

"Yes, but sometime we'll get away from this life."

"And when we do, boys, we'll have better things than beads for our sweethearts."

"But Katrina likes beads."

"And there's the poorest beads in the world on board

the *Queen of France*. Crozat isn't sending good beads to Africa to exchange for slaves. He's loaded up with the poorest in the market; they're flashy and all that, and as for value—they are not worth a stuffed doll."

Simon turned away disgusted.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Jack, as he pointed out the dark shape of a ship. "That must be the *Red Raven*."

"No mistake this time," responded Thad, after looking a spell. "I can make out her shape distinctly."

Oliver now came back from the wheel.

"How's your helmsman?" asked Thad, and he fell back at the expression on Oll's face.

"He's dead, sir," reported Oliver.

"Dead—M. Joinville?"

"Yes. He has killed himself."

The boys ran forward and bent over a figure lying on the deck.

"How did he do it?" asked Thad, looking up into Oliver's face.

"With something he suddenly took from his bosom. I had just told him that the *Red Raven* lay out yonder, as you can see she does, when he reached into his bosom and took out something which he crushed between his teeth."

"Poison!" said the others in the same breath.

"Undoubtedly."

"He could not bear the disgrace of having his ship fall into our hands," said Jack.

"That must be it," and Oliver lifted the man's head and all gazed at the proud and haughty face of the captain of the fleet.

"I can take her on," resumed Oliver. "The helm is one just to my hand and the *Queen* answers it gallantly."

The trader was sent directly toward the ship which had been sighted, and in a short time Thad heard the expected hail.

"That is Noland's voice!" cried our hero. "He has been left in charge."

Thad answered, saying that they were coming back from the town with a prize, and Noland told them to come alongside.

As Thad sprang on the *Red Raven's* deck he ran afoul of the handsome second officer.

"I heard fighting in the town," said Noland.

"Yes. They must have had it out with De Bienville and his minions."

"But with what result?"

"Time will tell. Ah! yonder is a sound of boats on the water. The captain must be coming back."

"Or some of the enemy."

All listened with the greatest anxiety, and for some time nothing but the sound of oars was heard.

Suddenly, as if it had risen from the deep, a boat came into view almost under the bows of the *Red Raven*.

The stentorian voice of Capt. Kidd came to the ears of all.

Noland sprang to the ship's side and let down the ladder.

There was a scramble and a volley of curses and the red coat of Kidd dropped on deck.

He saw first Noland and then Thad and his friends.

"You?" he cried to our hero. "We went back after you, and here you are."

"And yonder is the prize we brought you," and Thad pointed toward the *Queen of France*. "'Tis Crozat's flagship and——"

"Never mind. You got us into a peck of trouble. We've lost some of our best men in the streets trying to find you young rats. We've lost Dragon——"

"Lost Dragon!" echoed Simon, upon whom Kidd turned with a look as dark as a thundercloud. "That's the best thing——"

Capt. Kidd whirled upon the Dutch boy with a tremendous imprecation.

"We'll hang you to-morrow!" cried the sea wolf. "So you think it good to lose the best all-round fighter that ever fought on a deck? Iron him, Mr. Noland."

Simon laid his hand on his cutlass, but Thad gently pushed him back.

"My men are scattered in the town," continued Kidd. "Some are dead and others are in De Bienville's hands. We'll make them pay for their work!" and with another oath he turned and tramped below, where all heard him growling like an enraged lion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EAR OF DRAGON, THE MERCILESS.

"The captain is in a passion," remarked Thad, as he rejoined Simon below deck. "He has lost Dragon——"

"Then we are rid of that monster at last," interrupted the Dutch boy. "The captain may hang me to-morrow, but the first officer of this hated barque will not be there to see me pull hemp."

"We will have a little to say about that hanging," returned our young hero. "Kidd may take another view of the matter before the hour comes round. He thinks of nothing now but the fight in New Orleans and his losses."

Presently Jack came below.

There was a grin on the ex-guard'sman's face.

"The dead has come to life!" he said.

"What, has Dragon turned up?" cried Simon, leaping up and slapping his sides.

"Yes. He came on board a minute ago, and a sorry, looking object he is."

"How so, Jack?"

"One ear is gone—lopped off by one of the French soldiers. Then, he has a scar on his cheek that he will carry to his grave if he ever gets one——"

"And Hugo——"

"Oh, he came back, too—three fingers missing and one of his eyes nearly wrenched from its socket."

"Which one?"

"The blinking, gray eye. You never saw such a mangled pair of rascals," and Jack fell upon a lot of trumpery and gave vent to his pleasure in a loud guffaw.

"What are they saying?" asked Thad, when he could get a word in.

"They talk of nothing but vengeance, of course. They want to go back and clean out the whole town."

"I should think they had had enough of it."

"Not so. It is difficult to overfeed a wolf, you know, Thad."

"That's Dragon now," and the boys drew back as they watched the door, for a heavy tread had sounded on their ears from the corridor.

In another moment the door opened and there stood the hideous figure of Dragon.

He wore a bloody bandage round his head and a patch of court plaster tried in vain to hide the mutilation of his face.

"So you sneaked back and left us to bear the brunt of the fight?" he cried.

"We came out of the town as best we could, and it was by the skin of our teeth at that."

"But you've got whole skins, I see."

"It was our good fortune," replied Thad.

"Better than mine," was the answer. "But for you I would now have two good ears, whereas I have but one."

"Did ~~you~~ kill the fellow who lopped the one off?" queried Simon.

"Shut up!" and the next moment the huge bulk of Dragon came across the floor and he halted menacingly in front of the Dutch boy. "I feel like cutting off both of your ears, you young kraut eater."

"I couldn't look much worse than you do now," grinned Simon, who hated the first officer with all his heart.

"Don't add insult to injury," roared Dragon, as he laid his hand on his cutlass. "I got the chap who lopped me, but the one who left his mark on my face I didn't get. I'm going back after him, though."

The boys saw that it would do no good to irritate the man, so they desisted, and he presently went growling to the door.

"What a pretty specimen of humanity he is," said Thad. "It's a pity De Bienville's men did not keep him in New Orleans."

"It would have been our gain," and Thad looked at the door as if he fully expected to see the man-monster come back.

Capt. Kidd stood in his cabin facing Noland, who leaned against the wall.

"So the lads brought in the *Queen of France*?" said Kidd, looking at his lieutenant.

"Yes, a vessel loaded with beads and trinkets for the African trade."

"But her captain?"

"He was forced by Thad to take the wheel and killed himself when he discovered that he was near the *Red Raven*."

"What, M. Joinville?"

"Yes, captain."

"It was a good mistake on the part of the lads," and Kidd smiled. "De Bienville evidently does not know that the *Queen* is in our hands?"

"It is likely that he has not yet heard the news."

"Ah, that is fine," and Kidd rubbed his hands with glee. "We can take her right up to the docks."

"That were possible, but daylight you know would show him that we have the *Queen*."

Kidd consulted his jeweled watch and looked again at Noland.

"It is just midnight," said he. "We can go in to-night."

"But the *Queen*, I am told, is poorly off for guns."

"To perdition with the cannon!" exclaimed the captain of the *Red Raven*. "We don't need cannon, but for fear we should, we can put some on board."

Noland did not like the idea of going into New Orleans after the desperate battle waged in the streets between the pirates and De Bienville's men.

But Kidd was inexorable.

"Muster the crew," said he. "See that the men of the *Queen* are given their choice—to go in and fight with us or swing at the yard within the hour."

It was a hated duty for Noland, but he performed it.

He proceeded to the captured vessel and called the men before him.

They elected to fight under the leadership of the redoubtable pirate of the rigolets.

That was settled in a few moments, and upon inspection, Noland found that the *Queen*, although a trader, was better armed than he thought, for traders in those days were liable to encounter enemies at sea and sometimes were obliged to fight for life.

Kidd had not abated his intention of going back to New Orleans.

He declared that he would rescue the men he had left in De Bienville's hands and burn the town.

A guard was left in the *Red Raven*.

The *Queen of France*, without the piratical flag at her mizzen, but under her own colors, tacked and was soon moving toward the town.

In order to aid the deception, Kidd wore the gaudy uniform of the dead captain over his famous red coat, and took the poop deck.

"What ship is that?" cried out a watch from the deck of a large vessel as the *Queen* moved in.

"The *Queen of France*, Capt. Joinville," answered the pirate disguising his voice as he looked over the high rail.

"We thought you were in."

"No, we are going back. We've been out looking for the rascal under the black flag."

"Did you discover him?"

"No; but we'll try him in the morning," and the *Queen* kept on.

"So far good," said Kidd, as he turned to Dragon, who stood near. "The silly fools think we are the *Queen*. It's a neat bit of deception which we owe to our young tigers."

Dragon frowned.

"I owe them something, too—the loss of my ear."

"You can take half a dozen ears over yonder, and from the aristocracy of France," responded Kidd, as he turned his glass toward the lights of the town.

Thad and his friends had been ordered on the *Queen*, and stationed near one another.

"Bad luck will come of this," said Thad in low tones to Oliver. "This may be a fatal move for Capt. Kidd. The town is still in a ferment of excitement and De Bienville will be on his guard."

"It's the captain's lookout," was the reply. "He thinks that his star will always be in the ascendent, but one of these days it will sink forever."

There was audacity in the idea which Kidd was now carrying out.

He was certainly bearding the lion in his den.

De Bienville, the governor of New Orleans, would be on the alert, especially since he had discovered that he had not settled the sea wolf in the fight in the streets.

At that moment he was in his own mansion in company with Crozat.

These two worthies were rejoicing over their victory.

"Think you," said the trader, "that Capt. Kidd will remain satisfied with his chastisement?"

"If he is a sensible man he will," was the retort. "We got by far the best of the fight."

"And lost some good men."

"Soldiers, that's all," said De Bienville. "Soldiers are enlisted to get killed."

"Of course, your excellency."

"How is your pretty niece?" asked the governor.

"She has recovered from her excitement. She came near being killed by that giant who came ashore and found her near the ruins of the mansion."

"Where have you quartered her?"

"At the house of her aunt, Madame Jarfeuse. She is safe there, and I have given orders that she shall not come out till to-morrow afternoon at the earliest."

De Bienville remained silent for a moment.

He was a handsome old man of sixty-five and a widower.

The whole city knew that he had cast admiring eyes upon Mathilde, and it knew as well that old Crozat approved of the match, which was one of the probabilities of the near future.

"See that she is kept off the streets," said De Bienville. "I don't want her wings soiled by contact with these greasy scum of the sea. She's too pretty to come against such ruffians."

"I will see to that," responded Crozat. "I had thought of sending her to the *Queen of France*, but I changed at the last minute, and confined her to the care of her aunt."

The two men drank to the entire discomfiture of Capt. Kidd and his horde, and their glasses clinked merrily in the high-ceiled apartment.

"You were in the thick of the *mêlée*, I hear," remarked the trader, setting down his glass.

"Yes. I couldn't remain out of it honorably. I snatched up my sword at the first reports and met the pirates in the street. We had it hot and heavy for quite a time. At one time I was matched against as mean a ruffian as I ever saw, a great hulk of a fellow, who looked like a colossus. We had it thrust and cut for some little time, and I at last lopped off his ear——"

"Maimed him for life, eh, your excellency?"

"That I did. He howled like a wolf as I delivered the thrust, which I followed with the terrible blow. Let me show you, my dear Crozat."

De Bienville opened a drawer in the table near at hand and took out a packet, the outer wrappings of which showed traces of blood.

"One of the soldiers found this on the street after the *mêlée*," he went on. "You can judge of the wearer by the ear. He couldn't have washed for years, and yet he had plenty of water."

"The whole sea, by my life!" laughed Crozat, bending forward to inspect the ghastly thing De Bienville had unwrapped.

Presently the trader fell back with a startled face.

"What if the loser should come back for his ear?" he said.

"Then I'll get the other one," grinned the governor. "I wish he would come after it."

Crozat did not reply, but he evidently shuddered, while the governor put the ear away.

"What's that noise in the street?" asked De Bienville, going to the window. "Have the people broken loose again? Well, they have cause for rejoicing. Perhaps they want to hang the six prisoners we have in the ~~round~~ prison. No, it is not that."

He had opened the window and was standing at it, the cool air of midnight blowing on his cheeks.

"Make them wait till morning for that pleasure," said Crozat. "We need a little sleep after the tussle with Capt. Kidd——"

"My God!" cried De Bienville, breaking in and shutting off his companion's sentence. "Do you hear that, M. Crozat?"

The trader was at the window in a moment.

Just then a figure flitted before the house, the front door flew open and Mathilde almost tumbled headlong into the room.

"Merciful heavens! they have come back!" cried the beauty of New Orleans. "And at their head is a bloody-faced pirate who says he has come for his ear!"

De Bienville, the royal governor, turned pale and almost collapsed, while on his ears rose, like the roar of a lion, the voice of Dragon.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE GOVERNOR OF NEW ORLEANS DIED.

The return of Capt. Kidd and his minions was enough to strike terror to the hearts of all.

They had come back to New Orleans with the intention of taking vengeance for their defeat and to recover the men who had fallen into the governor's hands.

It is no wonder that De Bienville turned pale when he heard the voice of Dragon as that worthy threatened vengeance for the loss of his ear.

The pirates were not far off.

Mathilde looked at the two men, who stood white-faced and silent in the room, while the cries of the buccaneers swelled upon the air and made the night hideous.

"Who took the ear?" asked the girl.

De Bienville threw a swift glance toward the drawer in which that member had been placed, but said nothing.

"I had that honor, mademoiselle," he said in lowered voice. "I am the owner of the rascal's ear."

"You?"

Mathilde shrank away with the word on her lips.

De Bienville suddenly became bold.

"Let him come and get it, he cried, as he took down a handsome sword. "I will take the other ear and exhibit both together."

After the lapse of three minutes the cries seemed to lull for a time.

"They've gone down the other street," suggested Crozat.

"For a time only. They will find you!" cried the girl.

"The sooner the better," remarked De Bienville, as he gripped the hilt of the long sword and looked toward the window.

"Why don't you call out the Royal Guards, monsieur?" asked the trader.

"They must be under arms now."

Just then a volley came to the ears of the three and the panes shook.

"The guards!" cried Mathilde, as she ran forward and looked out.

"Aye, they have met the scoundrels," laughed the governor. "They will show Capt. Kidd that there are heroes in New Orleans."

"And cowards, too," said the girl. "Come and see. The guards are running!"

She leaned fearlessly out of the window, which she had flung open.

It was true; the Royal Guards were in precipitate retreat, as yet from an unseen foe.

In another moment the pirates came in sight.

Mathilde fell back from the casement with a cry which sent a thrill to the hearts of the two men who heard it.

"Come!" said Crozat, as he caught the girl's arm and dragged her back. "We shall be slaughtered here in a minute. What! M. le Governor? Do you intend to fight the whole horde?"

The old man stood firm, with his teeth hard set.

There was the fire of youth in his eyes, for De Bienville, when aroused, was no coward.

"Let them come," he said firmly. "We will defend this mansion to the bitter end. And, besides, I want the other ear of that rascal out yonder."

The wild horde was now in the spacious grounds in front of the governor's residence.

It was a black, moving mass, with here and there a glimpse of red cap and coat, and the air rang with the yells of the pirates.

The trader sprang to De Bienville's side and tried to pull him away.

"In a moment, monsieur, it will be too late," cried the frantic man. "They will be over the threshold."

"Let them come!"

The governor was immovable.

The beautiful Mathilde added her entreaties to those of her relative, but the old man did not stir.

"We must let him die in his folly," she said, looking at Crozat. "At least we can escape."

The two were about to quit the room when the sounds grew louder.

The roar of Dragon was heard on the steps of the mansion.

Suddenly behind the trio a door opened and Mathilde fell back as she caught sight of Thad and Simon.

"You here?" cried the French belle. "Who sent for you, young pirate?"

"No one, mademoiselle," was the answer, as Thad advanced. "If you want to escape death you will follow me."

Crozat drew back, and Mathilde, with the same stern demeanor, faced our hero.

"What! be saved by one of your kind?" she exclaimed. "I will not!"

"Aye, but you must," and Thad came forward while he threw a glance of command at Simon, which the Dutch boy understood.

"This way, mademoiselle," he continued, as he laid his hand on Mathilde's sleeve. "You must come at once if you would not die."

He pulled her away, and Simon, pushing Crozat in front of him, reached the open door.

Still like a statue in the middle of the room stood the doomed governor of New Orleans.

Thad looked at the stern figure in amazement.

"It is Monsieur le Governor," said Crozat, noticing the glance. "He is going to face the pirates——"

"Then he dies!"

Thad escorted Mathilde through the door and into the adjoining room.

Simon did the same for the trader, and just in time.

The wide front door of the mansion fell inward with a crash.

Into the house poured the piratical horde.

The red coat of Capt. Kidd was most conspicuous, and behind it came the bandaged and bloody face of Dragon.

Thad slammed the door shut and laid his hand on his sword.

Mathilde shot him a look of astonishment, but did not speak.

"Go forward. You know the way out," he said to her. "The governor is a fool to die where he is."

"The governor is a brave man," said Mathilde. "He will defend the honor of France while you——"

She did not finish, for she looked at our young hero and turned away.

De Bienville, with compressed lips, awaited the horde in the large chamber.

Not a muscle of his face quivered.

There was good blood in the De Bienvilles, and for years they had sustained the honor of France.

He heard the rushing, yelling mob in the hallway.

He seemed to count the seconds that would intervene before they would be on him, and he held his sword ready for the first bosom.

"This way," shouted a voice beyond the door. "This must be the room."

In the flash of an eyelash the door was burst open.

De Bienville started forward and threw up his blade.

"Here he is!" cried a huge pirate as he caught sight of the man in the middle of the room.

A smile came at once to De Bienville's lips.

"Ha! here I am, coward!" he sent through his set teeth, and then there was a lunge which no man could parry, and into the broad bosom of the foremost wolf of the sea sank the point of his blade.

There was a wild shriek as the man lurched back against his comrades, then he was thrown to the floor and the others came on.

The old man backed against the wall.

He struck out, hot and furious, but threw away no strokes.

Never before had the dogs of the ocean met so valiant an adversary.

Kidd admired the old man who, with flowing white hair, for his wig had fallen off, reminded him of some paladin of old, some knight of the crusades.

He would have saved the old hero.

In fact, he called out to those in front of him to spare the life of De Bienville, but that moment the old Frenchman lunged for the fourth time at a bosom and the point of his sword vanished in human flesh.

The pirates could not be controlled.

They rushed at the old fighter against the wall and in another moment twenty cutlasses were flashing in circles around De Bienville's face.

He did not despair even then.

His sword shot out here and there and never missed a stroke or a parry.

Dragon shouted to the men to end the battle.

"At him! Cut him down!" he cried. "He's going to get some of your ears——"

De Bienville burst into a defiant laugh.

"I'm the man who got yours, dog," he shouted.

This was too much for Dragon.

He yelled at the top of his voice and pushed the pirates right and left in his attempt to reach De Bienville.

"Come on!" cried the old man. "Clear the way, men. I'll take his other ear, that I will!"

Dragon looked and saw the old man erect, with the sword ready to carry out his cool threat.

"Stand back and let us have it out! He took my ear," he says. "I'll have both of his!"

But it was not to be.

At that moment a huge pirate lurched into view.

He saw De Bienville against the wall and did not notice Dragon.

"Ha!" he shouted. "So this is the old man who rules the town! This is De Bienville!"

"At your service," politely answered the governor, as he caught sight of the speaker.

"Then take that! You hanged my brother three years ago."

The pistol that flashed in the governor's face was fired point-blank.

It was leveled over Dragon's shoulder and the leaden missile went straight to its mark.

The uplifted arm of the old man dropped.

In another instant he had recovered in a measure, but it was only a spasm of strength and eagerness.

"For France!" he cried. "Down with the scum of the sea and the king's enemies."

He lunged straight at Dragon, but he did not get far.

The hand of death was at his heart.

He pitched forward with the sword gripped in his good right hand, and the glare of defiance still shone in his eyes.

But for the pistol of the pirate the bosom of Dragon would have felt the steel of De Bienville.

They yelled over the old man's body.

In a moment the face was a trampled mass of flesh, and out of the room dashed the maddened horde.

Meantime Thad and his friends had conducted Mathilde and her relative to a place of comparative safety.

The French girl did not like Thad the more for that.

"You're a pirate, and some day," cried she, "the king will hang you!"

"We will take our chances," smiled our hero. "Mademoiselle, if you wish, I will conduct you back to where the governor is."

A strange smile gathered at the girl's lips.

"Better there than here under the care of a boy buccancer," was the prompt retort, which brought a flush to Thad's face.

As for Crozat, he stood like a man dazed and listened to the sounds which the breeze wafted from the governor's house.

Thad had halted in a garden some distance from the street, and he, too, heard the sound of battle in the residence.

At last they heard the pirates in the street again.

"It's all over," said Mathilde. "We can go back now."

"And face the men of the *Red Raven*?"

"Why not? We have faced them before."

Thad and Simon listened to the noises down the street and knew that the battle in the governor's house was over.

"You are safe if you remain here, mademoiselle," said Thad, as he turned to the girl.

"But we thank you not," she replied, with her old hauteur. "You will never be less a pirate. You deserve death in the king's noose."

"Listen to that," cried Simple Simon. "She's a young tigress, Thad, and I would like to have the taming of her."

"You?" and Mathilde rushed to the Dutch boy's side. "I will never be tamed by you. *Ma foi*!"

She jerked Simon's cap from his head and throwing it on the ground, stamped it into the dust with her pretty shoes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST CHECKMATE.

"What's the matter on deck?"

"I'll be hanged if I know, Thad."

"Dragon seems to be in one of his tantrums again. He has never got over his failure to kill the governor last night."

It was the morning after the battle in the streets of the Crescent City and the governor's residence.

The pirates were back again on the *Red Raven* and Thad and his chums had followed them.

All at once heavy footsteps came down the passageway and the door of the boys' cabin swung open.

Noland stood there.

"You're wanted on deck," he said, and then leaning into the room, he continued: "Be courageous and keep your temper under all circumstances."

"Come," said Thad to Simon and Oliver. "We have to face the man with one ear."

Up the ladder they went and soon stood on deck in the glowing rays of the rising sun.

The whole deck of the *Red Raven* seemed alive with men.

Kidd, with folded arms, leaned against the mainmast.

Thad looked and saw Dragon with his bandaged face and a gleam of vengeance in his eyes.

Not far off stood Hugo nursing his wound while, bound and lying flat on the planks, was a man who looked like an officer.

His garments were costly and fine and he wore the rank of colonel in the French service.

He was the commander of the Royal Guards, who had fallen into the hands of Kidd the previous night and had been carried to the *Red Raven*.

"Stand over there," said Dragon the moment our friends came on deck, and he pointed to a vacant spot near the tier of guns.

Thad and his chums obeyed without a reply.

"We want you to act as executioners," continued Dragon. "We have here the person of M. de Marat, the colonel of the guards. He must die."

Thad looked over to the young officer, who did not seem to take much interest in the proceedings, for he had given up hope and expected no mercy at the hands of his captors.

Dragon sprang forward and jerked the prisoner to his feet.

"Stand it like a man," he said, with his usual brutishness. "It won't last long. Come forward there, my young hearties. The rope is ready. You will be our Monsieur de Paris for the time. Lay hold there and help carry the man to the noose."

Thad, who had stepped a pace forward, stopped and drew back.

Dragon noticed this and snarled.

"Do you refuse?" he cried, stamping the deck. "Do you refuse to obey?"

"I am not a common hangman," said Thad, deliberately. "That would suit you better."

The big officer fairly roared in his rage.

"What's this—mutiny?" cried he.

"Take it as you please."

At that moment Thad saw the face of Noland.

It was wreathed in smiles, for the second officer was rejoicing in the act of defiance he was witnessing.

"Come along, all three of you," said Dragon. "Take the doomed man to the yardarm. He's able to walk, of course, but he must have a little ceremony in this his last appearance on the deck of the Jolly Roger."

"We refuse."

Capt. Kidd looked at Dragon, but did not speak; he seemed to admire Thad's defiance.

Dragon, with a savage oath, whipped out his cutlass and advanced upon the youthful trio.

"Go to work!" he thundered. "I am master of this ship for the present."

Thad fell back and carried Simon and Oliver with him.

"It must come to this sometime, I suppose," he said through his teeth as he drew his pistols and deliberately cocked them.

Dragon looked amazed.

"This is worse than mutiny!" he cried.

"It means that we do not intend to become executioners of a brave man at the whim of a monster," said Thad coolly. "We will not hang M. de Marat."

The first officer of the pirate barque threw a swift glance over his shoulder.

He had twenty ruffians at his back, among whom was Hugo, the hunched fiend, and he sent them the look that meant the destruction of our young heroes.

He pointed at the young officer, and then looked at Thad again.

"To your work," he howled. "This must be done and by your hands. I will teach you how to become the regular hangman of the *Red Raven*."

"Not while I have a shot in my pistol," returned Thad, as he raised his weapon and looked into Dragon's face.

The ruffian fumed in his fury.

At the same time Simon and Oliver laid their hands on the butts of their weapons and drew nearer to the determined Thad.

"We serve Capt. Kidd, but not you," continued our young hero. "We will not obey the mandate of a man who has lost an ear."

This only increased Dragon's rage; the allusion to his mutilation drove every vestige of discretion out of his mind.

Over the face of the doomed man came a look of hope.

There was something grand about the handsome face of the young colonel that interested Thad and his chums.

He was too young and too brave to die at the yardarm.

Suddenly the voice of Capt. Kidd startled all.

"You will take the prisoner below, Mr. Dragon," he said.

Dragon whirled, with blanched face, upon his master.

"But your orders——"

"I've changed my mind," was the cool interruption. "We will settle M. de Marat's case later on."

"But——"

"Take the prisoner below, I say."

Dragon bit his lip halfway through. Terror stood in his eyes, and he seized the arm of M. de Marat and turned toward the hatchway.

In another minute he had vanished with the reprieved man.

The smile broadened on Noland's mouth.

"What did it all mean?" asked Thad of the second officer half an hour later. "Did Capt. Kidd really intend to have the young officer hanged?"

"I doubt it," replied Noland. "I think I can see through it now. He wanted to see how far you would obey Dragon——"

"Well, he found out, Noland," broke in Thad, gently. "He found out that we will not obey that monster in anything. We have passed that point."

Noland looked away for a little while.

"We got none the best of the fight in New Orleans," said he. "We lost some of our best men. We got no spoil, though the town may yet yield some. We killed the governor, and will be outlawed by the French king. Another score of hatred against us! We will sail to-morrow."

"For good?" eagerly asked Thad.

"That I cannot say. We will not go so far but that we can come back in a few hours and cruise among the rigolets. There are some good prizes in the gulf and some dangers, too."

"Where one is you will always find the other," responded Thad, as handsome Noland turned away.

Kidd's whim went so far as to release M. de Marat who was sent back to the town.

The young officer looked gratefully at Thad and his chums as he descended into the boat, and the boys wondered if they were ever to encounter him again.

As the boat put off Thad heard a growl behind him, and he turned to meet the tigerish gaze of Dragon.

Not a word fell from the bully's lips, but Thad understood the gleam that lit up his dark eyes, and he said in a low whisper to his friends:

"We shall feel the teeth of the tiger before long. Keep a lookout for them."

"I'm doing that all the time," replied Simon. "And at the first chance I'll knock some of them out."

The following day the *Red Raven* stood out to sea, her sails bellying in the strong breeze, and as she steered for the open waters of the gulf, thousands in New Orleans thanked Heaven for her departure.

The gulf was to become the scene of startling adventures under the Jolly Roger; Thad and his chums were to meet with the most extraordinary perils and dangers, but these will be described in the next issue of the RED RAVEN LIBRARY, entitled "Tiger of the Sea; or, The Three Castaways of the Gulf."

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